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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON **SHMINI ATZERES – SIMCHAS TORAH –**
V'ZOS HABRACHA - 5777

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Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg

Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres: Hashem's Expression of Love

On Shabbos chol hamoad Sukkos we read from Parshas Ki Sisa. The simple reason this portion was chosen is because it mentions the shalosh regalim. But the kriyas haTorah also discusses the second luchos, the thirteen attributes of divine mercy, and the dialogue between Hashem and Moshe Rabbeinu about whether a malach or Hashem himself will lead Klal Yisrael. What do these other topics have to do with the yom tov of Sukkos?

The Tur (Orach Chaim, 625) asks a famous question. If we sit in sukkos to remind ourselves of the clouds of glory that surrounded Klal Yisrael when they left Mitzrayim, then why do we celebrate the yom tov of Sukkos in the month of Tishrei? Since Klal Yisrael left Mitzrayim during Nissan, we should celebrate Sukkos then.

The Vilna Gaon (Shir Hashirim, 1:4) answers that on Sukkos we are not commemorating the clouds of glory that enveloped Klal Yisrael when they first left Mitzrayim because those clouds disappeared after cheit ha'eigel. But after Hashem forgave Klal Yisrael for cheit ha'eigel on Yom Kippur, they received the command to build the Mishkan, and when they started building the Mishkan on the fifteenth of Tishrei the clouds of glory returned. It is this return of the clouds of glory that we commemorate by sitting in sukkos because this showed that Hashem had forgiven Klal Yisrael for cheit ha'eigel and He was willing to rest His Shechina on them once again. Since the clouds returned during the month of Tishrei, we celebrate Sukkos specifically at this time.

This idea can help explain why we read Parshas Ki Sisa on Shabbos chol hamoad Sukkos. At the beginning of the kriyah, Moshe Rabbeinu asks Hashem not to rest His Shechina on any nation except Klal Yisrael, "V'niflinu ani v'amcha mikol ha'am asher al pnei ha'adama - and I and your people will be distinct from all other nations of the world. (Ki Sisa, 33:16). Later, after Hashem teaches Moshe the thirteen attributes of mercy, Moshe once again asks, "Yeilech na Hashem b'kirbeinu - let Hashem dwell in our midst"

(34:9), and Hashem responds, "I will establish a covenant (with you); I will make distinctions (e'eseh niflaos) with your people." Rashi interprets that here Hashem finally agrees to Moshe's request that Klal Yisrael should be different (v'niflinu) than all other nations in that Hashem should rest His Shechina only on them.

These pesukim are especially appropriate for the yom tov of Sukkos because, as the Vilna Gaon explains, it was on Yom Kippur that Hashem forgave Klal Yisrael and agreed to rest His Shechina on them, and then on Sukkos He reaffirmed that commitment by returning the clouds of glory which represent the Shechina.

The return of the clouds of glory on Sukkos could be another reason why we refer to Sukkos as zman simchaseinu - the time of our happiness. The simple explanation is that this refers to the happiness of the farmer who rejoices in the new harvest. Others explain that Sukkos is a time when we feel simcha for the atonement we achieved on Yom Kippur. But in light of the Vilna Gaon's comment, it would seem that Sukkos could be called zman simchaseinu because the fifteenth of Tishrei is the time that Klal Yisrael saw Hashem's intense love for them when He returned the clouds of glory and He established a covenant to rest His Shechina only on them. This realization that we enjoy such a special relationship with Hakadosh Boruch Hu is a source of great simcha and it transforms Sukkos into zman simchaseinu.

The expression of love between Hakadosh Boruch Hu and Klal Yisrael reaches a climax on Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah. On Sukkos we sacrifice a total of seventy bulls but on Shemini Atzeres we sacrifice only one bull. Rashi (Pinchas, 29:35-36) quotes the Midrash which explains that the seventy bulls we sacrifice on Sukkos correspond to the seventy nations of the world, while the one bull we sacrifice on Shemini Atzeres represents Klal Yisrael. Why do we bring korbanos corresponding to the nations of the world only on Sukkos? The answer is that the korbanos of Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres demonstrate the unique bond between Hashem and Klal Yisrael. The reality is that Hashem sustains the entire world and, in truth, the yom tov of Sukkos which celebrates the new harvest is relevant to all of the nations. But Hashem has a special relationship with Klal Yisrael that is expressed by the private feast that Klal Yisrael enjoys with Him on Shemini Atzeres (see Rashi there).

Shemini Atzeres is the culmination of the yom tov of Sukkos because it serves as a contrast to the universal yom tov of Sukkos. Shemini Atzeres is Hashem's expression of love for Klal Yisrael. It shows the unique relationship that Klal Yisrael has with Him. There are no special mitzvos on Shemini Atzeres because the simcha of Shemini Atzeres comes from simply feeling a sense of closeness to Hakadosh Boruch Hu. On Shemini Atzeres we don't need a simcha shel mitzvah to help us express our joy because we are overcome by a feeling of "nagilah v'nismecha bach - we will rejoice and be happy with You" (Shir Hashirim, 1:4).

And that is why Simchas Torah is linked to Shemini Atzeres. When Hakadosh Boruch Hu forgave Klal Yisrael on Yom Kippur he gave them the second luchos, the gift of Torah, to demonstrate his love for them. On Shemini Atzeres this love is expressed once again when Hakadosh Boruch Hu asks of Klal Yisrael to be his special guest for one last day of yom tov. We reciprocate by rejoicing with the Torah and showing how much we appreciate his gift and his expressions of love for us.

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VZOT HABRACHA

Rashi points out that the blessings of Moshe to the Jewish people are based upon and mirror those of Yaakov as recorded for us at the end of the book of Bereshith. There are blessings that are eternal and always valid. There are those that are contemporary to the times in which they were given but have little relevance to other times. The blessings of both Yaakov and Moshe are of two individual tribes regarding their locations in the Land of Israel and their individual traits and characteristics as warriors, merchants, scholars, and as part of the national fabric of the Jewish society. Over the long years of the exile of the Jews and their disappearance from the Land of Israel, these blessings seem to be pure poetry and not related to any reality. However, the words of the Torah are eternal and therefore in our time these blessings have acquired relevance and actuality. We are once again a society of warriors, sailors, scholars, merchants and farmers. All of the traits that we were denied expression of during our long sojourn in exile have once again come to the fore in our daily lives. So, the blessings of Moshe have immediate and deep meaning to our generation and to the society in which we live. Perhaps this is part of the connection to the past, which is indicated in the introduction of Moshe to his blessings, a connection not only to the blessings of Yaakov but also to the original Jewish settlement in society that inhabited the Land of Israel millennia ago. Part of the blessing that Moshe has bequeathed to us is the fact that even though no person is replaceable, still no person is indispensable. If there is any one person about whom the Jewish people would feel that they could not do without it certainly would be Moshe. Nevertheless, though his influence and teachings remain with us thousands of years after his death, the Jewish people have continued throughout human history. The reality of human mortality is coupled with the miracle of Jewish eternity. All of us live on through the future success and development of the Jewish people. Those who are attached to the Jewish people, heart and soul, unconditionally so, are attached to an eternity that is not subject to the nature of human mortality. This is because of our attachment to the God of Israel Who has proclaimed that "you who go out attached to the Lord your God are all still alive even today." That is the point that Moshe wishes to impress upon us in this final chapter of the Torah. Moshe lives on through the Torah that he taught us and through the people of Israel that he helped form and lead during his lifetime. This great idea of comfort and eternity is truly the great blessing that he bestowed upon us. All of the other detailed blessings, important and vital as they are, are nevertheless only corollaries to this great blessing of eternity and continuity. Chag sameach Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Nisson E. Shulman
Shmini Atzeret: Hold On!

Today is Shmini Atzeret. What does Atzeret mean?

Samson Raphael Hirsch, in his commentary to the Torah, offers some remarkable insights into this word, and through the word, into this holiday. He points to a primary and secondary meaning.

The primary meaning is "to gather"; to gather, not only people, but also ideas and ideals. We can see this best from its usage in connection with other holidays. Thus, the word is used to describe the seventh day of Passover. On the seventh and last day of Pesach, we are to gather all the lessons of the holiday from the first Seder night and through the holiday, and relive them all. The abolition of Chametz, the lesson of freedom, faith in God, trust in His prophet Moses, Atzeret, take them to heart. Review them, so that they stay with you.

Shavuot is also called Atzeret, because it is connected with Passover. The freedom lesson of Pesach is not completed till Shavuoth when we received the Torah. For freedom has meaning

only when we accept the responsibilities it demands. The path from Egypt leads directly to Sinai. So on Shavuoth we take to heart the lessons of both holidays, Pesach as well as Shavuoth. They go hand in hand. That is why Shavuoth is also called Atzeret, because it is a time to gather together the lessons we have learned during the nine weeks from Pesach to Shavuoth.

Now let us consider Shemini Atzeret. If, like on Pesach, the word Atzeret had been used for the seventh day, then like on Pesach Atzeret would be a command to gather the lessons of the entire Sukkoth. And there is, indeed, a great deal to learn from Sukkoth: God's Providence; the Clouds of Glory that protected us in the desert and stand for God's watchfulness in history that we survive, as we have till now; Thanksgiving, through the Etrog, Lulav, Hadas and Arava; transience of material things, that everything can fly away, Havel Havalim.... so we go out of our permanent solid home and live for the week in a flimsy hut with silly walls and no roof. All this we would learn if the SHMINI Atzeret fell on the seventh day of the holiday, like the Atzeret of Passover does.

But Shemini Atzeret does not fall on the seventh day of the holiday. It falls on the eighth day. And it therefore is not the additional day, but an eighth day YOM TOV all to itself. That's why there is no Etrog and Lulav on SHMINI Atzeret. That is why some don't eat in the Sukkah today, and even those who do, omit the beracha because it is not a mitzvah of the day.

The Talmud describes how different from the seventh day of Sukkoth was the Temple service on this day. The eighth day has its own special character. Why? Because the lesson of Shemini Atzeret does not refer to Sukkoth alone! It refers to the entire holiday season! We are commanded on this day to gather and to take to our hearts all the lessons of all the holidays of the entire season, including Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Sukkot! Lessons such as: That G-d is One; that He is our King; that we are accountable to Him. That we are commanded to look into our own hearts, judging ourselves as He judges us all; the lessons of Teshuva; Kapara, Selicha, the confidence in man that he can improve; given a second chance, start again, from YOM HAKIPURIM, washed clean again. And the joy that must follow, expressed in Sukkot. Life then is truly joyous, when a man is pure and blameless. All the holidays are gathered here today, and all their lessons. Holy days to be sure; MIKRAEY KODESH: but also good days, YAMIM TOVIM, good days if we make their inspiration last throughout the coming year.

All the holidays: and in fact not from Rosh Hashana on. Because in counting the holidays, the Torah tells us to start from Pesach! So that Shemini Atzeret, this gathering festival, is the last holiday of the entire year till we begin the yearly cycle again from the coming Pesach. So all the lessons of all the holidays must be gathered by us this day. Gather lessons, gather strength from them all. That is the first meaning of the word, to gather.

Atzeret has another meaning too. ATZOR means to stop. If you have seen a red stop sign in Israel, you know the word ATZOR. Put on the brakes. Stop. And in addition to stop, it also means, "Hold tight!" Don't let go! And for us that meaning is obvious. Don't let these lessons go, but hold on to them throughout the coming year. Let them last. Let them persist.

Rashi cites from the Talmud, a beautiful picture inspired by the name Atzeret. It is as if the Lord tells His beloved people, "I cannot part with you. Tarry yet a while longer." Does Rashi mean to say that God wants one more day with us in Jerusalem? As if He, KIVEYACHOL, was begging for our presence? Hardly. Rashi was teaching this lesson: that it is as if the Lord says to Israel, "Wherever you are going this year, stay in My presence! Hold tight to the Holiday lessons! Don't let go!"

The same lesson can be applied to Yizkor, for after all, since Yizkor is said on each holiday, then this is the last Yizkor of the holiday year

till Pesach, when we begin again. So if Yizkor is to have a lesson and message for us, it is to gather the lessons our parents taught; make them our own – and hold on to them – lessons of martyrdom and sacrifice, of course. We are too close to the holocaust. Our parents, brothers, sisters, some times even children lost in that holocaust. Make the lessons of martyrdom so real that we should not need reminders; reminders of that which is seared across our consciousness more indelibly than pogrom and massacres of Chmielnicki or the Inquisition or Crusade or even Churban of Israel of old could ever be.

We remember their martyrdom till this very day. But we remember more. We remember heroism, scholarship, virtues of loving-kindness. We remember their love of family, and the beautiful society they created, the princely bearing the queenly beauty of fathers and mothers on Friday night surrounded by their beloved children. Truly, when compared to our forefathers, who can say, "We are better than they? Do we not suffer by comparison? Aval Anachnu Vaavotenu, Chatanu. But in spirit they are here today. Their ideals are here. Their teachings are with us freshly remembered. Hold on. Keep their strength, their love, their ideals. Make it part of your lives. Don't lose it.

Yesterday, someone complained to me with the often-heard words, "Rabbi, isn't it too bad that so many of our Jews are only seen in shul at Yizkor and Yahrzeit? How sad must their idea of Judaism be. How little they have of our faith." It is "too bad"? No! It is wonderful! At least they come for Yizkor and to say KADDISH. At least they have this connection, be it ever so little. What might otherwise happen to such Jews with utterly no connection to Judaism? Our precious Yizkor and Yahrzeit have kept countless Jews connected to Judaism, and even made better, more faithful Jews of many. From the next world our parents call to us and hold on to us, and cry out to us. ATZOR! "Hold on!" Remember our parents and their parents before them. Gather their lessons. Make it part of yourselves. Hold on to synagogues, to community, to Israel. It may sometimes seem to be a fragile link, but it is a lifeline. Hold on!

This is a Yizkor in a critical time in our history. Once again our people are threatened, especially within their borders, but also by anti-Semitism world wide. We don't need a special command at this Yizkor to hold on to the memories of our recent martyrs, those whose sacrifice we share with our tears, our anguish. Their sacrifice is so fresh, so close to our hearts. But we do need the message that just as we recite Yizkor for them, so we have for countless years recited Yizkor for previous martyrs, great souls whose lives were sacrificed so that the people of Israel shall live; live even to this time and to years to come AD BIAT HAGOEL. So Yizkor can give us strength. Just as Shemini Atzeret contains the values of all our holidays, so Yizkor can give us the courage and the ideals of all our ancestors! Moses, and the Torah; Aaron, with his Priestly vestments and holiness; Elijah and his fiery zeal, the Maccabees and their heroism. They can all strengthen us through this moment, from Abraham and Saran and their vision that spans the centuries, their faith and trust. Their lives and ideals are with us at this moment. Hold on! Hold on to their words, their spirit, their valor, their strength, and their power. It is our power too, if we make it ours. And if Providence requires that nowadays we have new martyrs and heroes to add to the list, Lo Bechayil, Velo Bekoach, Ki Im Beruchi, Amar Hashem Tzevakot, The power that comes, not by force of arms, but from the spirit of God of Israel, in the words of David the King, For It Is G-D Who Will Give Our Enemies Into Our Hands, For The Battle Is The Lord's!

<http://www.thejewishstar.com/stories/A-wild-British-Simchat-Torah,10085>

KOSHER BOOKWORM: **ALAN JAY GERBER**

A wild British Simchat Torah

Posted October 20, 2016

What an irony. I always knew that the first commentary on a Sukkot machzor describing the rather sharp medieval reaction to a British-based Simchat Torah service would come from the pen of a former British chief rabbi, in this case, **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**. This strange chapter in Jewish religious history, and Rabbi Sacks' interest in it, was foreshadowed last month in an essay by the rabbi on his website entitled, "**The Deep Power of Joy**," wherein he relates to us the following: ... [See original below]

... FOR FURTHER STUDY Israeli theologian and teacher, Rabbi Alex Israel, has an interesting essay online entitled, "Simchat Torah: Where is the Joy?" (thinkingtorah.blogspot.co.il) in which he begins with the following observation: "Simchat Torah is not an easy holiday. I think that there are few people who feel an innate rush of energy that propels them to dance endlessly with the Torah. It is for this reason that people stand at the side and talk, people resort to the kiddush option; many people only truly participate in the dancing to give their kids an authentic Simchat Torah. But how many participants are rejoicing with the Torah, celebrating its completion, reveling in the beautiful synergy of Torah and the Jewish people?" ...

<http://www.rabbisacks.org/>
The Unmatched Power of Joy
by **Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

On October 14, 1663, the famous diarist Samuel Pepys paid a visit to the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in Creechurch Lane in the city of London. Jews had been exiled from England in 1290 but in 1656, following an intercession by Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel of Amsterdam, Oliver Cromwell concluded that there was in fact no legal barrier to Jews living there. So, for the first time since the 13th century, Jews were able to worship openly.

The first synagogue, the one Pepys visited, was simply a private house belonging to a successful Portuguese Jewish merchant, Antonio Fernandez Carvajal, which had been extended to house the congregation. Pepys had been in the synagogue once before, at the memorial service for Carvajal, who died in 1659. That occasion had been somber and decorous. What he saw on his second visit was something else altogether, a scene of celebration that left him scandalized. This is what he wrote in his diary:

... after dinner my wife and I, by Mr. Rawlinson's conduct, to the Jewish Synagogue: where the men and boys in their vayles (i.e. tallitot), and the women behind a lattice out of sight; and some things stand up, which I believe is their Law, in a press (i.e. the Aron) to which all coming in do bow; and at the putting on their vayles do say something, to which others that hear him do cry Amen, and the party do kiss his vayle. Their service all in a singing way, and in Hebrew. And anon their Laws that they take out of the press are carried by several men, four or five several burthens in all, and they do relieve one another; and whether it is that every one desires to have the carrying of it, I cannot tell, thus they carried it round about the room while such a service is singing ... But, Lord! to see the disorder, laughing, sporting, and no attention, but confusion in all their service, more like brutes than people knowing the true God, would make a man forswear ever seeing them more and indeed I never did see so much, or could have imagined there had been any religion in the whole world so absurdly performed as this.

Poor Pepys. No one told him that the day he chose to come to the synagogue was Simchat Torah; nor had he ever seen in a house of worship anything like the exuberant joy of the day when we dance with the Torah scroll, as if the world was a wedding and the book a bride, with the same abandon as King David when he brought the holy ark into Jerusalem.

Joy is not the first word that naturally comes to mind when we think of the severity of Judaism as a moral code or the tear-stained pages of Jewish history. As Jews we have degrees in misery, postgraduate qualifications in guilt, and gold-medal performances in wailing and lamentation. Someone once summed up the Jewish festivals in three sentences: "They tried to kill us. We survived. Let's eat." Yet in truth, what shines through so many of the psalms is pure, radiant joy. And joy is one of the keywords of the book of Devarim. The root s-m-kh appears once each in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, but twice times in Devarim, seven of them in our parsha.

What Moses says again and again is that joy is what we should feel in the land of Israel — the land given to us by God, the place to which the whole of Jewish life since the days of Abraham and Sarah has been a journey. The vast universe with its myriad galaxies and stars is God's work of art, but within it planet earth, and within that the land of Israel, and the sacred city of Jerusalem, is where He is closest, where His presence lingers in the air, where the sky is the blue of heaven and the stones are a golden throne. There, said Moses, in "the place the Lord your God will choose ... to place His Name there for His dwelling" (Deut. 12:5), you will celebrate the love between a small and otherwise insignificant people and the God who, taking them as His own, lifted them to greatness.

It will be there, said Moses, that the entire tangled narrative of Jewish history would become lucid, where a whole people — "you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites from your towns, who have no hereditary portion with you" — will sing together, worship together and celebrate the festivals together, knowing that history is not about empire or conquest, nor society about hierarchy and power, that commoner and king, Israelite and priest are all equal in the sight of God, all voices in his holy choir, all dancers in the circle at whose centre is the radiance of the Divine. This is what the covenant is about: the transformation of the human condition through what Wordsworth called "the deep power of joy."

Happiness (in Greek eudaemonia), Aristotle said, is the ultimate purpose of human existence. We desire many things, but usually as a means to something else. Only one thing is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else, namely happiness.

There is such a sentiment in Judaism. The biblical word for happiness, Ashrei, is the first word of the book of Psalms and a key word of our daily prayers. But far more often, Tanakh speaks about simcha, joy — and they are different things. Happiness is something you can feel alone, but joy, in Tanakh, is something you share with others. For the first year of marriage, rules Devarim (24:5) a husband must "stay at home and bring joy to the wife he has married." Bringing first-fruits to the Temple, "You and the Levite and the stranger living among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household" (26:11). In one of the most extraordinary lines in the Torah, Moses says that curses will befall the nation not because they served idols or abandoned God but "Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness out of the abundance of all things" (28:47). A failure to rejoice is the first sign of decadence and decay.

There are other differences. Happiness is about a lifetime but joy lives in the moment. Happiness tends to be a cool emotion, but joy makes you want to dance and sing. It's hard to feel happy in the midst of uncertainty. But you can still feel joy. King David in the Psalms spoke of danger, fear, dejection, sometimes even despair, but his songs usually end in the major key:

For His anger lasts only a moment, but His favour lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning ... You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. Lord my God, I will praise you forever. (Psalm 30:6-13)

In Judaism, joy is the supreme religious emotion. Here we are, in a world filled with beauty. Every breath we breathe is the spirit of God within us. Around us is the love that moves the sun and all the stars. We are here because someone wanted us to be. The soul that celebrates, sings.

And yes, life is full of grief and disappointments, problems and pains, but beneath it all is the wonder that we are here, in a universe filled with beauty, among people each of whom carries within them a trace of the face of God. Robert Louis Stevenson rightly said: "Find out where joy resides and give it a voice far beyond singing. For to miss the joy is to miss all."

In Judaism, faith is not a rival to science, an attempt to explain the universe. It's a sense of wonder, born in a feeling of gratitude. Judaism is about taking life in both hands and making a blessing over it. It is as if God had said to us: I made all this for you. This is my gift. Enjoy it and help others to enjoy it also. Wherever you can, heal some of the pain that people inflict on one another, or the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. Because pain, sadness, fear, anger, envy, resentment — these are things that cloud your vision and separate you from others and from Me.

Kierkegaard once wrote: "It takes moral courage to grieve. It takes religious courage to rejoice." I believe that with all my heart. So I am moved by the way Jews, who know what it is to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, still see joy as the supreme religious emotion. Every day we begin our morning prayers with a litany of thanks, that we are here, with a world to live in, family and friends to love and be loved by, about to start a day full of possibilities, in which, by acts of loving kindness, we allow God's presence to flow through us into the lives of others. Joy helps heal some of the wounds of our injured, troubled world.

<http://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/front-page/the-joy-of-torah-2/2016/10/20/> rabbipruzansky.com

The Joy of Torah **Rabbi Steven Pruzansky**

Posted on October 21, 2016

Simchat Torah is the culmination of the entire festival season. Gone, at first glance, is the awe of Days of Awe, and the fearfulness of the period of judgment is replaced by a day of rejoicing and revelry. The change in mood is so striking — certainly from the solemn joy of Yom Kippur but even from the inner happiness experienced on Succot — that it is not unknown for the spiritual highs of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur to be lost or forfeited in the riotous behavior some indulge in on Simchat Torah. This refers not just to the execrable drinking that occurs in certain precincts but especially to the ambiance that pertains in many (but by no means all) shuls.

Thus, one who takes a young child to shul only on Simchat Torah and Purim is probably not inculcating in that child the reverence that should typify our deportment in shul, and it will probably take years of training to reverse that impression. That is not to say that young children should not be taken to shul on Simchat Torah but rather that they should be put on notice that the conduct they will witness is atypical.

Undoubtedly, the festivities are cathartic for those who are uncomfortable with the seriousness of Yom Kippur. All of which begs the question: what exactly are we celebrating on Simchat Torah? Of course, one is obligated to rejoice when completing any cycle of Torah study, and so the conclusion of the annual Torah readings and its immediate renewal are appropriate grounds for rejoicing. These are milestones in life, and the transition from Moshe's death with the Jewish people poised to enter the land of Israel back to the beginning — literally, "in the beginning" — reflects another year in which we have heard, studied, internalized and been uplifted by the Torah's

message. Now, another such year is beginning. And rather than going back to the same place – both in the Torah and in our lives – we are actually ascending a spiral staircase in which we gaze back at the previous year, cherish the insights that have shaped our minds and refined our deeds, and eagerly anticipate the next cycle of readings.

And so we dance, and do hakafot with the Torah in appreciation and gratitude for the divine gift to the Jewish people. Some argue today that hakafot on Simchat Torah are an example of the innovations that once characterized Jewish life that have now been frozen by a stultified Rabbinat. Well, not quite. The hakafot of Simchat Torah are actually extensions of the hakafot that are made throughout Succot. Every day of Succot we grasp our arba minim and march around the Torah that stands in the center. On Simchat Torah, we hold the Torah itself, and circumambulate the place from which the Torah is read. Better said, we are circling our version of Sinai – the shulchan from which the sounds of Torah emanate – and celebrating with “He who chose us from all the nations and gave us the Torah.”

After weeks of repentance and soul-searching, confessions and fasts, and on the verge of returning to our daily lives, we need to celebrate the Torah, elevate it in our eyes, show our love for it and prepare to re-integrate it in all its aspects. Amid all the celebrations, we must realize that dancing with the Torah is not an end in itself but a natural expression of our love for Torah. But that love is primarily actualized not by holding the Torah, waltzing, fox-trotting or tangoing with the Torah, or even kissing the Torah when it passes in front of us. That love is fully consummated only when we study the Torah, observe its laws, cherish it, and protect and preserve it from those who try to modify it to suit the times.

One cannot love the Torah and constantly find fault with it nor can one love the Torah and negate or minimize its divine origin. One cannot love the Torah and try to change it, anymore than one can love a spouse while trying to change that person as well. Both are futile quests. We can only change ourselves. Sometimes, we have to change ourselves to accommodate the spouse who might have an irritating trait or two (love conquers all). Sometimes we have to change ourselves and surrender to the dictates of a divine Torah, even when we find some of the commandments challenging in one way or another.

It is a basic rule of Jewish life that every person will have to struggle with at least one area of Torah, even if only because the Torah demands that we overcome our natural instincts and defer to G-d's will. In theory, only the perfectly righteous observe the Torah without difficulty, but the perfectly righteous are not that large a demographic today. Nonetheless, true love of Torah always requires that we conform to G-d's will rather than expect G-d's will to conform to our needs.

Not long ago, a Yeshiva high school principal wrote that “the reconciliation of the Torah's discussion of homosexuality represents the single most formidable religious challenge for our young people today.” Without at all discounting, trivializing or minimizing the struggle that some have with this issue, if such is “the single most formidable religious challenge for our young people today” they should count their blessings. And this conclusion accounts for the genuine pain many people feel over their circumstances, which is quite often heartbreaking and should always evoke our empathy. It takes into account the pain of families wrestling with this challenge. But the greatest reality – the one that governs our lives – is the reality of G-d's existence and the laws of the Torah He gave us.

So the world has never spared the Jewish people formidable religious challenges, and to be sure, many Jews have unfortunately succumbed to those challenges. But imagine if our young people today had to deal with grinding poverty, relentless persecution,

pogroms, the Holocaust, the Haskalah, high infant mortality and forced conversions. Imagine if these young people had to witness their families murdered before their eyes by an enemy driven to destroy them because of its hatred of Torah. Imagine if they had to encounter the Inquisition or were forced to abandon all their worldly possessions and flee into exile. Imagine if these young people had no job on Monday because they failed to show up for work on the previous Shabbat. Imagine if kosher food was not readily available in every supermarket, and there weren't kosher restaurants aplenty to satiate every palate. Imagine if they had to travel hundreds of miles to use a mikveh, as some Jews in the former Soviet Union had to do. Imagine if they were denied the right to learn Torah under the penalty of death. Just imagine...

They should be thankful to have such a “formidable” challenge as the one they claim to have, even acknowledging that it is serious and often tragic. But we should wonder whether or not we are doing an adequate job in educating our young people that Torah sometimes requires sacrifice or pain or struggle, and observance of the Torah sometimes means that we cannot always get our way.

Not every desire can be reconciled with the laws and morality of the Torah, even if the zeitgeist decrees that you can always have everything you want, how you want it and when you want. It is just not true. That is when we show our love for Torah by surrendering to G-d's will.

Just because young and modern people disagree with something in the Torah does not make them right and the Torah wrong. Perhaps, indeed, it is the reverse. One would think that a primary focus of Jewish education today (in truth, I assume it is) would be to impart to children the reality of life as G-d mandated it to us. Only G-d's vision of mankind is real – not anything that we concoct. Only G-d's morality can preserve mankind's hopes, dreams and aspirations. Only the truths of Torah can remind man that he is created in the image of G-d and has been given the tools with which to best serve G-d, perfect his soul and enjoy life on this planet.

Again, without trivializing anyone's pain or the struggles they confront, it stands to reason that if we investigated every generation going back to ancient times, young people in every generation undoubtedly found something to take issue with in the Torah. When all their peers were worshipping idols, or marauding, or carousing, or eating any type of food, or enjoying the weekend (not Shabbat), or reveling in every new discovery and every act of rebellion against their elders, or when they saw their peers pursuing their life's dreams and desires unfettered by any external restrictions – it is not difficult to envision that many of them felt spiritual “challenges” as well. Those who overcame them are our illustrious ancestors in whose merit we exist today. Those who succumbed to them disappeared into the mist of history and were lost to our eternal people.

Every generation thinks it is reinventing the wheel and faces trials that no one else had before. In truth the wheel grinds on, and in every age Jews confront obstacles to the observance of mitzvot and the love of Torah. What we can never do is measure the worth or viability of Torah by contemporary standards of morality. If we ever did, among other problems that would not be a Torah worth sacrificing for or even dancing with.

On Simchat Torah in the Torah reading, we indirectly reference the famous Mechilta (Parshat Yitro) that every small child is taught: “And He said, ‘Hashem came from Sinai, shone forth to them from Se'ir, appeared from the mountain of Paran...’” (Devarim 33:2). To whom did G-d appear? The Midrash states that the nations of the world would have protested the giving of the Torah to Israel, so G-d first offered it to them. “He revealed Himself to the children of the wicked Esav (Se'ir) and asked, ‘will you accept the Torah?’” They answered with a question: “Mah k'tiv ba?” What is written in it? G-d answered “You shall not murder,” and the children of Esav responded that

homicide is a legacy from their ancestor, and so they rejected the Torah.

Ammon and Moav were also approached and asked “Mah k’tiv ba?” Told there are restrictions on lascivious behavior, they too declined, for their nations were founded on acts of immorality. The children of Yishmael were also offered the Torah and also asked “Mah k’tiv ba?” Informed of the prohibition “You may not steal,” they too protested. “Our forebear was blessed with this special talent, and so the Torah is not for us.

Conversely, when the people of Israel were offered the Torah, we answered “whatever G-d says we will do and we will obey,” “naaseh v’nishma” (Shmot 24:7). We did not ask “Mah k’tiv ba?” We accepted the Torah without investigation (even impetuously, as Rava, the great Amora, was taunted by a heretic, in Masechet Shabbat 88a) and only because we trusted the Lawgiver to give us a Torah that would guide us through life properly, satisfy every legitimate human need, and perfect our souls. We accepted the Torah unconditionally, even though to us it was an “aish dat,” a fiery faith that is not easily handled. We trusted G-d who is compassionate and merciful and knows the best way for man to live.

Some are still asking “Mah k’tiv ba?” – What is written in it?” – and conditioning their acceptance of the Torah on whether or not the commandments of the Torah suit them, their friends, their personalities, their business practices, their own moral conclusions, their family lives, their politics and their proclivities. But those whose acceptance of the Torah is predicated on “Mah k’tiv ba?” will never fully accept the Torah. They are substituting their morality for

G-d’s and, in effect, worshipping themselves.

Is that something to celebrate? Maybe on one’s birthday but that is not the meaning or import of Simchat Torah. On Simchat Torah we celebrate not the giving of the Torah but its incorporation into our lives and our profound joy in being entrusted with G-d’s eternal message for all of mankind. At the very least, we should feel an unlimited sense of gratitude along with the rejoicing.

How can we impart to younger Jews – raised in a world in which narcissism is considered normal and even healthy, and feelings matter more than truth or substance – the spirit of sacrifice, the nobility of surrender to G-d’s will, or the willingness to embrace moral notions that are Divine and objective but contrary to the prevailing norms?

Perhaps we can enlighten them as to the great people in our history who celebrated, loved and lived the Torah when it was not as easy as it is today: Rabbi Akiva (and countless others) who forfeited their lives to teach the Torah to the simple laborer who after a day of toil attends a shiur; parents who retain as their primary ambition in life raising children who love, respect and will learn the Torah; and communities that will faithfully transmit it unaffected by the winds of modernity that are gusting through others.

Those individual giants and committed communities have sustained us until today and will continue in the future. And we should underscore how every Jew has a share in that Torah, community and destiny if only he or she embraces them, a Torah that is “our lives and the length of our days.” That is the true and enduring celebration of the Torah.

Chag Sameach to all!

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Five Towns Jewish Times

Rabbi Yair Hoffman

Lakewood’s Techum Shabbos

In Lakewood, New Jersey, a battle rages. The battle is a halachic one and is concerned with the concept of Techumim – the outer boundary in which one may travel on Shabbos.

This halachic battle has caused no less than three seforim to be printed on the laws of Techumim in Lakewood, New Jersey alone. The first is by Rabbi Chaim Tzvi Gorelick, and was republished in 5774. The second is by Rabbi Yoseph Chananya Jacobovits and was published in 5772. The third is Gvul HaYam by Rabbi Yitzchok Menachem Weiss, published in Taives of 5775.

Of course these are not wars of violence, hate and or jealousy. They are the melchemta shel Torah - the scholarly analysis of the words of Torah – including the Tur, the Yerushalmi, and the Rosh. The three Seforim have brought to light more clarity in a very complex topic.

THE QUESTIONS

One original question was: May a resident who lives near the Yeshiva walk to Kimball Hospital (now Momouth Southern Campus) on Shabbos? Can one walk back to Lakewood from Brick hospital? Is there a difference whether it is to go to minyan? Is it permitted to go back to watch one’s kids (a possible great need where one can perhaps be more lenient)?

THE HISTORY

Almost 270 years ago, three brothers, John, George, and Henry Skidmore, wanted to make a sawmill in what was to eventually become Lakewood, New Jersey. They needed power for the mill, so they built a dam on the south branch of the Metedeconk River. A man-made lake was thus created. Eventually, people built housing on both sides of this lake.

Little did the Skidmores know that their decision would prompt the publishing of three erudite halachic volumes of Torah discussion.

In the 1800’s, that lake was named after the three daughters of a businessman, Joseph Woolston Brick, who owned the Bergen Iron Works. His daughters were Caroline (Cara), Sara (Sally), and Josephine (Jo), and the lake was named “Carasaljo.”

This lake, now divides the city into two parts, as do the parks (with no contiguous houses). The area of Lakewood where the Yeshiva is located, Northern Lakewood – is separated from the neighborhoods that are on the south side of the lake. The question is – are North Lakewood and South Lakewood one halachic city? Or are they two cities? In other words, does it just extend one’s 2000 amos into the first part of the second city or does it make one city?

Another question, by the way, is in regard to Tefilas HaDerech. If all of these are one city – then do we say Tefilas HaDerech with a Bracha from Lakewood to the Five Towns?

Before we address these questions, let us get some definitions.

HALACHIC DEFINITIONS

The term “Techum” means the border or boundary – the limit in which one may walk on Shabbos. “Shevisa” means where you have established your residency for Shabbos. A person may walk 2000 Amos in any direction of his or her established Shevisa. The Shevisa, however, can be expanded beyond just a home – it can be expanded to a halachic city.

A HALACHIC CITY AND THE BOX

When there are six or more inhabitable homes next to each other but not more than 70 amos from one another, this is considered a city. A box is created out of the houses where the most northerly house is the northern border, the most easterly house is the eastern border, the most westerly house is the western border, and the most southerly house in the southern border. If the house has a fence that is more than 10 tefachim high, then that fence can be counted as the house as well to be within the 70 amos. Others say that the box does not just follow the directions of the world, but must be made in the shortest possible distance.

A city can extend – as long as there are houses within 70 amos. If there are two groups of six houses then you can actually have 140 amos in between the two groups of houses.

It is universally recognized that the definition of a city has nothing to do with the legal municipalities.

TCHUM SHABBOS IN TERMS OF MILES

What is Techum Shabbos in terms of miles? How much is 2000 Amos? An Amah is 21.25 inches according to Rav Moshe Feinstein zt”l. The Chazon Ish holds it is about ten percent more and Rav Chaim No’eh holds that it is about ten percent less. Thus, the 2000 amos are anywhere between 1/2 a mile to 2/3rds of a mile according to Rav Moshe. Of course everyone should consult a competent Posaik for specific guidelines in his community

EXTENDED BOUNDARIES AND THEIR LIMITS

You may walk 2000 amos past your box. (In addition to that, according to the Tur and Ramah, you have another 70 amos before the 2000 amos – called a Karfah. The Mishna Brurah 398:5 writes that one should not protest if one is lenient with the Tur.) If, however, your 2000 amos takes you into the next city

but that next city was not within 140 amos of your city – then you must stop at that 2070 amos invisible border.

BOXING UP LAKEWOOD

When Northern Lakewood is boxed out – the box encompasses parts of South Lakewood. When South Lakewood is boxed out – it may not actually reach many parts of Northern Lakewood. This gives rise to the halachic debate as to whether, when the two parts are boxed out, the parts are considered one city or not.

Rav Gorelick holds that if someone lives in the box he is technically a resident of both cities. It is possible to establish ones shevisa – their residence – elsewhere – in other words not in one's actual house. This can be done by placing food in a place where one wishes to establish Shevisa and recite a formula. Thus, all one has to do is leave a jar of peanut butter that would spread over four slices of bread and the issue is addressed.

THE TWO SIDES OF THE DEBATE

Aside from how one learns the halachic issues and the sources, the question arises as to what the leading Poskim held. How did our Gedolei HaDor pasken this essential shailah? The Gvul HaYam (pages 25-28) gives a nice summary of the various positions. Of course, his conclusions are not necessarily agreed upon by all parties concerned.

There is a debate as to what the Chazon Ish held. Rav Chaim Kanievsky Shlita, and Rav Dovid Feinstein Shlita hold that the Chazon Ish was of the opinion that a city can be combined through boxing. Rav Nissim Karelitz holds that his position that the boxing out does not make it into one city. [In the Shoneh Halachos of Rav Chaim Kanievsky, he does write that it needs further analysis.] The Chazon Ish itself has in brackets [and the matter remains undecided].

Dayan Weiss (Minchas Yitzchok Vol. VIII #33) held that boxing out does combine cities. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky zt"l also held that boxing out combines them. Rav Elyashiv zt"l is quoted that boxing out does not combine cities (Machane Yisroel 3:6). It is said, however, that he allowed it for students of RJJ in Edison that were in Robert Wood Johnson Hospital to walk to a minyan in Edison. Rav Vosner zt"l is cited in the Dirshu Mishna Brurah that boxing out does combine cities. Rav Nissim Karelitz holds that it does not. Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky holds that boxing out does combine cities. Rav Shlomo Miller holds that boxing out does combine cities. Rav Yisroel Belsky zt"l held that one should not rely on boxing out to combine a city.

The Sefer Birurei HaMidos (a student of the Nodah BiYehudah) states, "veharibuyah aino michlal ha'ir and the box is NOT WITHIN THE CONFINES OF THE CITY."

Of course these are conclusions of the Gvul HaYam and are not necessarily fully agreed to by others who have interacted with these Poskim.

OTHER ISSUES

There is another question that is also debated. Even after one boxes out a city can a new box be made? Rav Shlomo Miller shlita is of the opinion that one cannot make a newer and bigger box. (The third sefer references his view.)

There is also the question of what the status is of a city within a keshes – a city bow. There is a halacha that if there is a city in the shape of a bow where either there is less than 4000 amos from the two ends of the city, and/or it is within 2000 amos of the out perimeter of the bow – then the entire bow is considered part of the city. What if the boxed out city lay within the city bow – will this connect the city in a manner that is halachically more acceptable than a boxed out city? This too may be a leniency – even according to those who do not hold that boxing out a city connects it to another halachic city.

THREE KEFARIM [TOWNS]

There may be a third issue too. The Gemorah in Eiruvim 57b states that if there are three cities in the shape of a triangle, one may "virtually" move the upper city to lay in between the two cities to form a straight line allowing for the techum to be extended past the tchums of the other two cities. The limitation is that it cannot be moved even virtually past 2000 amos. But does this make it one city as well, or does it just allow one to walk 2000 amos from one side to the other? Also can the city be "virtually moved" if the space that it is moved into is not as wide as that city? This issue is left out of Shulchan Aruch. Some are of the opinion that because of this – it is a problem. Others feel that it is not a problem at all.

The three Seforim all have maps and illustrations in which to apply the concepts.

These questions apply to virtually every city in America and Israel with a frum population and are particularly applicable to bungalow colonies. The sad truth is that most people ignore all issues having to do with Techum. The halachos of Techum Shabbos have become the step-child of Torah learning – "Oh, yes, we always skip that part." Torah should have no step-children.

Hopefully, these Seforim will help open the field.

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<http://parshathought.blogspot.com/> Parsha thought
Dvar Torah on the weekly parsha

By Yitzy Adlin

Friday, October 21, 2016

V'zos Habracha / Simchas Torah

Before Moshe is to take leave of this world, he blesses each of the tribes. Then he tells each tribe the key to its physical & spiritual success. Two of them are combined in one posuk, שמח זבולן בצאתך ויששכר באהליך, rejoice, Zevulun in your excursions, and Yissachar in your tents.

This partnership between Yissachar & Zevulun is the classic formula for the relationship between the supporters of Torah and the ones that engage in Torah study full time. Zevulun engaged in commerce to allow Yissachar to devote all his time to Torah study.

Why is Zevulun mentioned first in the posuk? Shouldn't it be Yissachar, who studied Torah full time, be mentioned first? The Yesod HaAvodah answers that the Torah gives preference to challenge; spending one's life in the beis medrash does not put one's spiritual mettle to the test in the same way that a business life does. Moshe therefore blessed Zevulun first that he should be able to keep the proper perspective: his financial success should be looked at as a means rather than a goal.

Reb Akiva Eiker shows us how to view our service to Hashem. The Torah begins with the letter ב & ends with the letter ל which spells לב, heart. If one looks at the letters before & after these letters in the alphabet, he will find כ before the ל and א before the ב spelling אכ. Looking at the letters after those, we find after the ל the letter נ and after the ב we find ג spelling בג. There is a rule in the gemara that the word אכ excludes something; the word בג includes something. The Torah is teaching us that, by putting the word לב to start & end the Torah, no matter how little one can accomplish in his Torah learning, like the אכ or how much one can accomplish in his Torah learning like the בג all that matters is that it's done with the לב, as long as whatever one does is done with the whole heart trying to get close to Hashem.

During Simchas Torah in the year 1948 in the Ponevitch Yeshiva, the elderly Shamash was very moved by the dancing of the boys & the excitement they had for Torah. He started thinking "if only my children were still alive, they would surely be among these boys dancing so feverishly but alas they are buried under some patch of ground somewhere in Europe".

As he was thinking about his children that were brutally taken from him and about how much Torah they could have learned had they still been here, his heart felt like it was going to burst from the pain and he started crying hot tears. He ran to where the Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Kahaneman was sitting & cried "Rebbe, where are my children? Why were they taken from me? They could have grown & been giants in Torah & yiras shomaim. Why were they taken?"

His cries tore the hearts off those who heard him & especially the Rav who also lost his family in the war. The Rav turned to him crying & said that, for them, we don't have to cry; they sacrificed their lives for Hashem. They are in a world now full of only good where they are learning in the bais medrash upstairs with all the holy people. Do you know why we need to cry?

We need to cry about ourselves! Where are we in the world? We are here and how much could we accomplish with every second that we are here? Every second we learn, we are getting life for eternity, reward that we can't fathom, and what are we really doing? Are we

taking advantage? It's our job to sanctify Hashem with life, to live a life of Torah & take advantage of every second.

As we finish this cycle of the Torah & prepare to start anew, what are our goals? How do we make this year better? Perhaps, if we realize that even though most of our time is spent out in the world, and most of our spiritual challenges consist of showing how a Jew is supposed to live & deal with people, Nevertheless, if we could make the commitment to utilize the time we do have for learning & doing mitzvos, to take advantage of the time we are given here, that no matter how much or how little it is, if we do it with all our heart, it will be considered as if we lived a complete Torah life!

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Parshat V'Zot HaBracha / Simchat Torah (Deuteronomy 33:1-34:12)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin Efrat, Israel –

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

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

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

A small town in Poland, with a limited number of Jewish families who were pious but ignorant of the holy texts, was in need of a rabbi. The parnass (community leader) was dispatched to the famous Volozhin Yeshiva to search for a candidate, but after being turned down by the most promising students, he became desperate. He finally approached a serious but other-worldly student with the bold request: “Come to be our town rabbi. We are a famous town: Rabbi Akiva, the Ramban and the Vilna Gaon are all buried in our community.” The student, adept at Talmud but ignorant of Jewish history, imagined a town of scholars and immediately left with the parnass.

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

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

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

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

We can similarly understand the seemingly incongruous tradition of reciting the memorial Yizkor prayers on festivals. In fact, the practice perfectly captures the essence of the day, as those precious moments quietly reflecting on our deceased loved ones offer us a unique opportunity to consider the ways in which their qualities and love continue to impact us. Indeed, there are few sources of more profound happiness than the realization that our loved ones live on through us, our children, and our descendants.

Shabbat Shalom

<http://www.ravaviner.com/>

Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim Rav Shlomo Aviner

How is it possible that UNESCO Denies our Connection to the Temple Mount and the Kotel?

Question: How is it possible that UNESCO ratified a resolution that there is no Jewish connection to the Temple Mount and the Kotel? Why do the Nations of the World Deny our Connection to Yerushalayim? Answer: In the year 5690, Ha-Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky, Rosh Yeshiva of Torah Ve-Da'at in Brooklyn, said: The leaders of the nations of the world are discussing to whom the Kotel belongs – to the Jews or to the Arabs. This is shocking! We have an entire tradition in the Torah, Gemara and Midrashim relating to the Temple Mount and the Kotel: The Akedah took place there, Yaakov Avinu slept and had his dream there, King David bought the land for full price, etc..., while the Muslim have a "story" that Mohamed visited there and tied his horse to the Kotel. How is it possible that all of our rights are denied based on a story?! Rav Kamenetzky answered that it is measure-for-measure. Since we ourselves are in doubt about the traditions of the Tanach and our Sages, Hashem shows us that even the nations of the world, the majority of whom believe in the Tanach, err in what even a nursery school child knows. Divine Providence clearly shows us this fact (Emet Le-Yaakov on Pirkei Avot p. 136 #131)

Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>

The Torah Is Not Yerusha – Only Morasha Parshas Vzot Habracha Posted on October 18, 2006 (5767) By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Torah Is Not Yerusha – Only Morasha

The Torah reading on Simchas Torah contains the well known pasuk [verse]: “The Torah was commanded to us by Moshe, a Morasha [inheritance] to the Congregation of Yaakov.” [Devorim 33:4] There is an interesting teaching in the Talmud Yerushalmi:

Everywhere we find the word *morasha*, it connotes a weakening of the idea of inheritance (*lashon deeha*) [Bava Basra 8:2].

Morasha is a peculiar word. It is not easy to translate. It is significantly different than the word *yerusha* [inheritance]. The connotation is that one has less ownership in an object that has come to him as a “*morasha*” than he does in an item that comes to him as a “*yerusha*.”

The Jerusalem Talmud is not referring to the source in our *pasuk* in Zos HaBracha but rather to a *pasuk* in Parshas VaEra: “And I will give it (referring to the Land of Israel) to you as a *morasha*.” [Shmos 6:8] The Yerushalmi points out that the people who were given this promise never made it to the Land of Israel. Virtually the entire generation who left Egypt died out in the Wilderness. How then can the Torah make the statement that it will be given to them as a *morasha*? The Yerushalmi thus cites this as proof for the difference in nuance between *yerusha* and *morasha*.

Had the Torah promised Eretz Yisrael to those who left Egypt as a *yerusha*, it would have belonged to them with no ifs, ands, or buts. However, the Torah used the weaker form — *morasha*, meaning that it will not necessarily be yours. In truth, it never became theirs.

It only became theirs to the extent that they gave it to their children. This in fact is the major connotation of the word *morasha*. The word implies “it is yours – sometimes literally and sometimes only to the extent that you pass it on to your children without ever having taken possession.”

The Yerushalmi then questions this explanation by citing our *pasuk* regarding the Torah being a “*morasha* for the Congregation of Yaakov.” The Yerushalmi answers that in fact this translation of ‘*morasha*’ applies to Torah as well!

Torah is NOT a *yerusha*. Just because my father had the Torah does not mean that I will have the Torah. Sometimes a person only has the Torah as a ‘*morasha*’. This means that if a person sweats over Torah and makes the effort to understand Torah and puts in the hours required to master Torah, then Torah actually becomes his. But there is no guarantee. Torah is not a no-strings-attached inheritance (*yerusha*). Without the sweat and the hours, Torah will only be something that the person can potentially pass on to the next generation (*morasha*).

Chazal teach a tradition based on the *pasuk*, “This Torah will not depart from your mouth or the mouths of you children or the mouths of your grandchildren forever” [Yehoshua 1:8]: If three generations are committed to learning Torah, then the Torah will never leave that person’s family. The Talmud [Bava Metzia 85a] summarizes this idea with the expression “The Torah returns to its host” (Torah *chozeres al achsania shelah*).

Someone once asked the Chofetz Chaim the very obvious and pointed question that we know people who descend from many generations of Torah scholars who are themselves ignorant of Torah. Unfortunately, we see millions of Jews that fit into this category. There are families that bear the name of prestigious *Gedolim* [Torah greats], who today may not even know what an *Aleph* looks like. What then does it mean “Torah *chozeres al achsania shelah*”?

The Chofetz Chaim explained that the Gemara’s analogy is very precise. The Torah is like a guest seeking its host’s home. Sometimes a guest knocks on one’s door. If no one answers the door, the guest will not come in.

“Torah *chozeres al achsania shelah*” means that if Torah has been in a family for three generations, the Torah will come “knocking on that family’s door” in future generations. But still, the younger generation must open the door for the guest. The guest must still be invited in by each new generation.

Unfortunately, this does occur. There is knocking. There are opportunities. But the door does not get opened. Torah is not a *yerusha*. It is only a *morasha*. The difference is that the former is

automatic, while the latter requires effort. If a person does not make the effort, his relationship to Torah might only be to the extent that he will pass it on to subsequent generations.

The Value of an Unknown Burial Place

In Zos HaBracha, the Torah teaches that the burial place of Moshe Rabbeinu is not known. [Devorim 34:6]

I read an interesting story recently about someone who was driving in Eretz Yisrael in the Golan Heights. He came to an intersection and picked up two Israeli soldiers who were hitchhiking. The soldiers piled into the back seat with their M-16s and started up a conversation.

As it turned out, the soldiers were not Jews, they were Druze. The Druze are loyal citizens of the State of Israel and serve in the Israel Defense Forces. They also have a difficult history with the Arabs.

The Druze soldiers explained that they have their own religion. They are not Moslem. The “father” of their religion is Yisro. They had a nice discussion and as they got to their destination and started leaving the car, the soldiers left the Jewish driver with a parting thought: “Our religion has something over your religion. Not only do we have something over your religion, we have something over the Christians and the Moslems as well. We know where the ‘father’ of our religion is buried. (Yisro is buried in the area around Teverya.) You do not know where Moshe is buried. The Christians do not know where the founder of their religion is buried. The Moslems do not even know IF the founder of their religion is buried. (According to their tradition, he ascended to Heaven before dying.)”

However, the truth is that it is not necessarily good to know where a person is buried. The Torah makes a point of telling us that we do not know and we will not know where Moshe is buried. The Talmud describes an attempt to locate the grave of Moshe Rabbeinu on Mount Nebo [Sotah 13b]. The attempt was foiled supernaturally. Why?

Rav Samson Rafael Hirsch explains that the Torah saw the potential that Moshe Rabbeinu’s grave could become a deity. It is important for all of us to remember that when we visit the graves of the righteous, we do not pray TO the righteous people that they should bless us. We are forbidden to pray TO a human being – dead or alive! We visit the graves of *Tzadikim* to ask that they petition on our behalf to the *Ribono shel Olam*. We are not allowed to daven TO the *Tzadik*.

The Torah saw the potential of such a thing happening with Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe was a person of such monumental stature that the Torah feared lest his burial place would become a shrine.

The Torah is also informing us that as monumental a person as Moshe Rabbeinu was, there needed to be a new leader once he died. No one could fill his shoes, but that was irrelevant. Life must go on. The Torah stresses this idea by emphasizing, “You will come to the Judge who will be present IN THOSE DAYS” [Devorim 17:9] and “You will come to the Priest who will be present IN THOSE DAYS.” [Devorim 26:3]

The fact that this Judge or this Priest is not in the same league with his predecessor is irrelevant. We are told that Moshe’s face was like the sun and Yehoshua’s face was only like the moon. Yehoshua was not in the same league as Moshe. But Yehoshua was going to be the new leader.

Rabbi Wein always quotes the maxim: “No man is indispensable, yet no man is replaceable.” This is very true. No man is indispensable to the extent that “we cannot continue onward.” Yet no man is replaceable either. People have their own unique contributions that can never be replaced.

This is another explanation of why Moshe’s burial place is not known. The Jewish people had to move forward. They had to continue with the next leader and the next generation. “A generation passes on and a new generation comes.” [Koheles 1:4] We can only

go to the leader who is present in our own generation. This is the way of the Torah and this is the way of the world.

https://www.ou.org/torah/mitzvot/meaning-in-mitzvot/beating_the_aravot/

**OU.org Hoshanah Rabbah Beating the Aravot on Hoshana Rabba
Rabbi Dr. Asher Meir September 28, 2012**

On the last day of Sukkot, Hoshana Rabba, we beat a bundle of willow branches (actually one is enough) on the floor (SA OC 664:4).

The source for this “beating” is in the gemara (Sukka 44b) which states that the custom was to CHABIT the willow branches. Rashi explains that CHABIT means to wave them, as we wave the lulav. The Bach on our siman points out that this word sometimes means to cast rather than to beat, and this justifies Rashi’s interpretation. But Rambam and many other Rishonim explain that it means to beat them, and this is the custom. The Bach brings support for this interpretation from the Mishna: Rebbe Yochanan ben Berukha states in the mishna that palm branches are beaten on the ground next to the Altar (Sukkah 4:6); in the gemara, it is explained that the Sages differ and claim that the mitzva is with a willow branch. But it is logical to assume that they don’t differ on the way in which the mitzva is carried out.

The mitzva is considered a cryptic one. Why do we beat the willow branches on the ground? There are two common explanations, both based on the identity of the four species with four different kinds of Jew.

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 30:12) likens the etrog, which has both taste and fragrance, to Jews who have both learning and good deeds; the palm, which has taste (in its fruit, the date) but no fragrance to those who have learning but lack good deeds; the myrtle, which has fragrance but no taste to those who do good deeds but lack Torah; and the willow to those who lack both Torah and good deeds. At Sukkot we bind all of these species together to emphasize that all Jews are united and interdependent.

The first explanation explains that the arava ceremony is like a silent prayer for rain. There are three reasons that the willow branch is the most appropriate species for this prayer. First of all, it is the most thirsty of all the species, as the Torah name “arvei nachal” (river willow) suggests. Second of all, it corresponds to the simple Jews who have a limited ability to serve HaShem through study, but precisely their simplicity gives a special power to their prayers. Finally, another understanding in the Midrash relates the four species to different organs of the body; the lulav is the spine, the myrtles the eyes, the etrog the heart, and the willow the mouth. The mouth again is connected to prayer.

By beating the willow branches on the ground, we symbolize both our prostration and also our need for rain to smite and penetrate the ground.

Another explanation seems somewhat less favorable to the simple Jews. According to this explanation, the smiting of the willow leaves symbolizes their affliction.

The simplest way of understanding this is by noting that at the end of Sukkot we untie the four species, as is mentioned explicitly in the Mishna. The hint is that the simple unlearned individuals who are not outstanding in observance are protected as long as they bind themselves together with the more righteous, but if the dare to separate themselves they are likely to endure affliction. The message is that even after the holiday it is important to keep connected to those outstanding in Torah learning and observance.

Rav Kook explains this approach in a much different way. He points out that we don’t smite the willow branch, but rather with the willow branch. The message is the opposite: In the different struggles the Jewish people face, particularly the ideological struggles, our true secret weapon is not the scholars with their brilliant reasoning, but precisely the simple Jews who are devoted to the mitzvot through habit and instinct. (Moadei HaRa’ayah.)

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/>

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

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**October 20, 2016 Thursday 18 Tishri 5777 The Jerusalem Post
Simhat Torah: What are we happy about? Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz**

What is this simha, the joy and happiness that we are celebrating? Simhat Torah is the last holiday in the string of Tishrei festivals that begins with Rosh Hashana, continues to Yom Kippur and Succot, and ends with Shmini Atzeret following Succot. Outside Israel, Shmini Atzeret is followed by Simhat Torah, while in Israel they are on the same day.

What is this simha, the joy and happiness that we are celebrating? Every Shabbat, we read a parasha from the Torah, and on this day, we complete all

five books of the Torah. We celebrate this completion with a huge celebration, with singing and dancing. The interesting timing of Simhat Torah begs the question: Why was it arranged so that completing the reading of the Torah comes out at the end of the series of holidays? Is this a coincidence? To answer this, we must get to the root of the connection between the People of Israel and the Torah. There are those who see the Torah as a book of directions and life guidelines. According to this outlook, the Torah is a way for us to know how to act in the world – what is permissible and what is forbidden; what is the moral path by which we should navigate our lives. This is undoubtedly true, but whoever looks at the Torah with this perspective alone misses the main point regarding the connection between the People of Israel and the Torah.

The truth is, the Torah is the closest thing to God that we know. It is an amazing essence of the Creator’s wisdom and ways. When we study Torah with the knowledge that it is a gift from God, we bring ourselves closer to Him and to His wisdom. To be clear – studying Torah is not a means for getting closer to God. Learning itself is getting closer to God. Because the closest thing to the Creator that can conceivably be reached is the Torah.

To delve deeper into this idea, it is important to know what the great thinker and rabbinical authority Maimonides said about the wisdom of God. According to him, many people are mistaken and imagine the Creator – like people they know – as an entity that has life and wisdom and knowledge. But that is not the case. He Himself, His knowledge and His wisdom are one and the same. His personality cannot be analyzed as segments. Based on this, and since the Torah represents for us the Creator’s wisdom and moral compass, when it is studied and when we walk in its path, we get closer and closer to God’s wisdom and goodness, which are God Himself.

In the past, the People of Israel had other ways of getting close to God. There were prophets who conveyed His word to the nation or to individuals, as needed. There was also a Temple and the worship that took place there. On Yom Kippur, for example, the High Priest had special and sacred jobs in the Temple accompanied by the prayer and blessings of masses of Jews who were present. At the peak of these jobs he would enter to burn incense in the Holy of Holies, the sacred site of the Tablets of the Covenant containing the Ten Commandments. Our sages say that on this day, a piece of red yarn would be tied to the entrance of the Temple and at a certain point of the Yom Kippur service, it would miraculously turn white, as in the verse: If your sins prove to be like crimson, they will become white as snow. Obviously, the entire event brought about immense closeness between the People of Israel and their Father in Heaven.

Sadly, after prophecy ceased and the Temple was destroyed, there was no possibility of getting so powerfully close to the Creator other than studying His Torah and letting it illuminate our path throughout our lives.

The period of the holidays is a wonderful time to get closer to God. At the beginning we pray to Him during the days of mercy and penitential prayers, peaking at Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. Then we take pleasure in His shadow during Succot, when we try to recreate our forefathers’ booths as they wandered in the desert after the Exodus from Egypt. These succot, these booths, represent God’s tremendous spiritual and material embrace during this time.

How nice and appropriate to end this period with the joy of completing the Torah! All this magnificent closeness to the Creator reaches its peak with the great celebration of the strong connection we have with God: His holy Torah! There is no better time to celebrate the end of the annual cycle of completion and beginning of the five books of the Torah than at the end of this unique month. The celebration is not merely a completion and beginning anew, but a mark of the incredible power of the eternal and inseparable triangle: God, the Torah, and the People of Israel. The writer is the rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites