



To: parsha@groups.io
From: Chaim Shulman <cshulman@gmail.com>

Internet Parsha Sheet

Hoshana Rabbah – Shmini Atzeres – Simchas Torah – V'zos Habracha 5787

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Errata: Clarification re my summary of Rav Frand's Hebrew article in *ימים טובים בהלכה* about Rain on First Night of Sukkos. The errors are my own. In last week's article, *Eating in the Sukkah When It Rains on the First Night*, several points require clarification. We attributed to Tosafos the ruling that one must eat a *kezayis* in the sukkah on the first night even while it is raining. That statement is actually from the Rosh (Berachos 7:23). However, Tosafos Berachos 49b holds that one may eat indoors while it is raining, but if the rain stops, one must return to the sukkah to fulfill the special first-night obligation. The practical ruling remains that, following the Rema and *Mishnah Berurah*, one should, if possible without too much *tircha* or

tzaar, wait an hour or two for the rain to stop, but otherwise if that is difficult or the rain does not let up, one should eat the required *kezayis* in the sukkah even in the rain, without reciting *leishev baSukkah* but with *shehechianu* and then go inside and eat the *seudas yom tov*, and later if the rain stops, the men who are still awake should if possible go back into the sukkah, eat more than a *kebeitzah* with a *leishev baSukkah* and *bench*. Of course, your Rav should be your guide on practical halacha. The archive copy on parsha.net/devarim has been modified to reflect the above.

Adapted and summarized from

R' Eliezer Brodt's The Mysteries of Hoshana Rabbah

BS"D
The Seforim Blog, 2017 at <https://seforimblog.com/2017/10/the-mysteries-of-hoshana-rabbah/>

The origins of most Yamim Tovim are relatively easy to locate. One begins with the relevant pesukim, Mishnayos, or Gemara and traces the later halachos and minhagim from there. **Hoshana Rabbah** is different. The seventh day of Sukkos is certainly present in Chazal, but not as the distinct day familiar to us today, with its special nighttime learning, lengthy tefillos, echoes of the Yamim Nora'im, and sense that the judgment of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur has reached its final stage. Its history has to be pieced together from many scattered sources, some very early and others that developed gradually over the centuries.

From Yom Aravah to Hoshana Rabbah: Even the name Hoshana Rabbah is relatively late. The Mishnah and Gemara do not use it, referring instead to *Yom Aravah* or *Yom Hoshana*. Rabbi Yaakov Stahl, after tracing these names through Geonic sources, *piyyutim*, and Rishonim, concludes that the earliest known use of Hoshana Rabbah appears in the *piyyutim* of Rav Yosef Avitur (d. 1024). Even then, the name took a long time to become standard. The *Chayei Adam* explains the name as referring to the many tefillos beginning with *hoshana*. A similar explanation appears much earlier in *Seder Hayom* of Rav Moshe ben Machir of Tzfas, first printed in 1599. Rav Eliyahu Bachur (1469–1549), in *Sefer HaTishbi*, explains that the *aravos* themselves came to be called *hoshanos* because while holding them we call out *hoshia na* – please save us.

The oldest foundation of the day, however, is not its name but the special *aravah* service described in the fourth perek of Maseches Sukkah, 42b–45a. In the Beis Hamikdash there was an additional *aravah*, apart from the one included in the *dalei minim*. Each day the *mizbei'ach* was circled once, while on the seventh day it was circled seven times. The seventh day also included *chavatah* of the *aravos*. Rashi on Sukkah 44b understands *chavatah* as shaking them, while the Rambam, *Hilchos Lulav* 7:22, describes striking them two or three times on the ground or against a utensil and identifies the practice as a *minhag hanevi'im*.

After the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, the hakafo around the bimah became a *zecher l'Mikdash*, recalling the circuits around the *mizbei'ach*, as the Rambam explains in *Hilchos Lulav* 7:23. Our seven hakafo on Hoshana Rabbah and the beating of the *aravos* are therefore not later additions to the day. They preserve its oldest layer, the ancient *Yom Aravah* of Chazal.

The Night of Hoshana Rabbah: One of the best-known later practices is the nighttime learning known as *Tikkun Leil Hoshana Rabbah*, but its history is more complicated than one might assume. Rav David Avudraham of Seville (14th century) records in *Sefer Avudraham* that some people would read through the entire Torah

that night if they had failed to complete *shnayim mikra* during the year. He did not endorse the practice and preferred that missed *shnayim mikra* be corrected earlier. The Tashbetz, a talmid of the Maharam MiRotenburg, was even more critical. *Shibolei HaLeket*, however, regarded the practice favorably and connected it with Hoshana Rabbah as the day of judgment for water. The early Italian *Minhag Tov* also records the custom, giving the striking explanation that since a person had already been judged on Rosh Hashanah for life and death, he should at least have reviewed his Torah learning. This earlier custom involved the Torah as a whole. The familiar practice of reading specifically Mishneh Torah, Sefer Devarim, became widespread through the teachings of the Arizal, Rav Yitzchak Luria (1534–1572). *Shulchan Aruch HaArizal* directs that Mishneh Torah be read on Hoshana Rabbah night. The practice was then spread through extremely popular works such as *Tikunei Shabbos*, first printed in 1613, and *Shaarei Tzion* of Rav Nassan Nata Hanover (c. 1620–1683), first printed in 1662. The later anonymous *Chemdas Yamim* also helped popularize the seder. In this way, what had once been one of several Hoshana Rabbah night customs developed into the familiar *Tikkun Leil Hoshana Rabbah*. Rav Yaakov Emden (1697–1776) suggested in his *Siddur* that reading Mishneh Torah might recall the king's reading of Sefer Devarim at Hakhel. He admitted that the explanation was somewhat farfetched but nevertheless deferred to an established minhag. Interestingly, what Rav Yaakov Emden considered a possibility was accepted by the Aderes, Rav Eliyahu David Rabinowitz-Teomim (1843–1905), who discusses it in *Zecher L'Mikdash*. He himself would read Mishneh Torah each year in his sukkah from a sefer Torah. Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop followed a similar practice, although Rav Moshe Feinstein opposed using a sefer Torah specifically for this purpose.

Many communities also incorporated Tehillim into the night. Rav Avraham Galante of sixteenth-century Tzfas, Rav Moshe ben Machir in *Seder Hayom*, Rav Yuzpeh Shamash of Worms in *Minhagim D'Kehal Vermeiza*, and Rav Yosef Hahn Norlingen in *Yosef Ometz* all record reciting the entire Sefer Tehillim. The Chasam Sofer would say the entire Tehillim and then sleep, and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach did the same. It is worth noting that the widespread notion that the essence of the minhag is necessarily to remain awake the entire night does not follow from all these sources. Torah and Tehillim were central; staying awake until morning was not necessarily so.

Echoes of Yom Kippur: Perhaps the most revealing Hoshana Rabbah customs are those that make the day resemble the Yamim Nora'im. The Tur and numerous other Rishonim mention lighting candles. *Leket Yosher* records that the Terumas HaDeshen would use, in part, candles left over from Yom Kippur. *Sefer Maharil* similarly records that the Maharil did so. Rav Yitzchak Tirna mentions the practice in his *Sefer Minhagim*.

Sefer Maharil also records that the Maharil wore a kittel on Hoshana Rabbah. The Rama cites a similar practice, while the Magen Avraham reports that in Poland the custom was instead to wear Shabbos clothes without a kittel. Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin records a custom for only the chazan to wear one. Other sources mention going to the mikvah, rising especially early, and davening in a manner more elaborate than on an ordinary morning of Chol Hamoad.

There were even customs involving additions familiar from the Yamim Nora'im. Some communities said Nishmas, although the Rama rules not to do so. Early sources record *Zachreinu l'chayim*, *Hamelech Hakadosh*, and *Hamelech Hamishpat*. Most strikingly, some early manuscripts of *Unesaneh Tokef* contain the words: ובהושענא רבה יחתמון – and on Hoshana Rabbah they are sealed. These customs are difficult to explain merely as an outgrowth of the Temple *aravah* ceremony. They reveal another understanding of Hoshana Rabbah, as a day connected in some way with the judgment of the Yamim Nora'im.

What Is the Judgment of Hoshana Rabbah?: The Gemara in Rosh Hashanah 16a provides one obvious answer. On Sukkos the world is judged concerning water. The connection with the *aravah* is especially appropriate, since the *aravah* grows by water. The Taz and Gra emphasize the fundamental importance of water to human life, while the Rokeach explicitly connects the *aravah* with this judgment. Yet judgment for water alone does not seem sufficient to explain the Yom Kippur-like atmosphere that came to surround Hoshana Rabbah. Kabbalistic literature famously describes the day as the final *chasimah* of the judgment begun on Rosh Hashanah. What is particularly interesting is that the idea of a final sealing of judgment is not limited to the Zohar or later Kabbalah.

Sefer HaManhig of Rav Avraham ben Nasan HaYarchi (12th century), explains the lighting of candles as on Yom Kippur, along with other customs, on the basis that judgment is sealed on Hoshana Rabbah. Some manuscripts of *Machzor Vitri*, compiled by Rav Simcha of Vitry, a talmid of Rashi, prescribe saying *Hashem Hu HaElokim* seven times on Hoshana Rabbah, as we do at the end of Yom Kippur, to mark the completion of judgment. Other early sources likewise contain indications of Hoshana Rabbah as a *gemar din*. The idea, therefore, has roots considerably earlier and broader than one might expect.

This raises an obvious question. If Hoshana Rabbah marks such an important stage of judgment, why do Chazal not say so openly? Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are openly days of judgment. Why should Hoshana Rabbah be almost a secret?

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky (1891–1986), in *Emes L'Yaakov*, gives a fascinating answer, similar to one recorded from Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (1910–1995) in *Halichos Shlomo*. Hoshana Rabbah falls during *zman simchaseinu*. If the judgment of Hoshana Rabbah had been publicized too strongly, fear of judgment might have interfered with the mitzvah of rejoicing on Sukkos. Chazal therefore did not emphasize this aspect of the day. According to this approach, knowledge of its deeper significance was originally more limited, but in later generations it could become widespread without overwhelming *simchas Yom Tov*.

A related idea already appears in the derashos of Rav Yehoshua ibn Shuaib, a talmid of the Rashba. He asks why even the Torah does not openly describe Rosh Hashanah as a day of judgment and suggests that such matters are not easily revealed or explained openly. Hoshana Rabbah seems to present an even stronger example of the same phenomenon.

Looking at the Shadow: One of the strangest Hoshana Rabbah customs shows just how seriously the idea of judgment was taken in medieval Jewish life. Avudraham records that some people would go outside in the moonlight on Hoshana Rabbah night and examine their shadow. If the shadow appeared complete, it was regarded as a favorable sign; if the head appeared missing, it was interpreted

ominously. Versions of the custom appear in an impressive group of Rishonim, including the Ramban, Rav Yehudah HaChasid, the Rokeach, and Rav Menachem Recanati.

An especially vivid example appears in a manuscript completed by Rav Eliyahu Bachur in 1515. At the end he notes that he completed the sefer on Hoshana Rabbah and had seen his head in the shadow of the moon, which he understood to mean that he would not die that year. Rav Chaim Benveniste, in *Shiurei Knesses HaGedolah*, explains that the purpose of such a sign was ultimately teshuvah: if a person saw something unfavorable, he would be moved to daven and attempt to have the decree overturned.

The practice was controversial. Avudraham himself says not to do it. The Rama likewise discourages it, both because the proper procedure was no longer understood and because one should generally not seek knowledge of the future. *Yosef Ometz* and *Mateh Moshe* take similar positions. On the other hand, *Sefer Kavanos HaYashan* records that the Arizal did practice it. This is a good example of a Hoshana Rabbah custom with a surprisingly old and distinguished pedigree that nevertheless never became generally accepted practice.

The Banging of the Aravos: The *chavatah* of the *aravos* itself is ancient, but later sources sought to explain the unusual act of physically striking the branches. Rav Alexander Moshe Lapidos (1819–1906) connects it with a broader principle found in the Ramban: a symbolic act performed in this world can give tangible expression to what we seek from Shamayim. The familiar *simanim* of Rosh Hashanah may be understood in a similar way. The physical act becomes part of the prayer for what one hopes will occur.

Interestingly, there is also a long history concerning what one does with the *aravos* afterward. Today many place them on top of the aron kodesh, but the early history of that practice is not entirely clear.

Malbushei Yom Tov of the Tosfos Yom Tov does mention such a practice, and the passage was already known to the *Eliyahu Rabbah*. Other early sources, however, describe something different.

Tanya Rabbasi, attributed to Rav Yechiel HaRofei in the thirteenth century, says that after the mitzvah people would bring the *aravos* home and place them near their beds as an expression of *chibuv mitzvah*. Rav Yair Chaim Bacharach, in *Mekor Chaim*, cites a tradition that keeping them also provided protection while traveling. The *Chayei Adam* and *Aruch HaShulchan* speak of burning the *aravos*, and numerous sources recommend saving them until Erev Pesach and using them in burning the chametz. The basic idea is familiar: an object that has already been used for one mitzvah should, where possible, be used for another.

Later sefarim attach various *segulos* to preserved *aravos*, but the older theme is perhaps more significant than the *segulos* themselves. The *aravah* that has been used for a mitzvah is not simply discarded. It continues to be treated as an object of *chibuv mitzvah*.

A Day With Many Layers: Hoshana Rabbah accumulated still other customs. Rav Ovadiah MiBartenura (c. 1450–c. 1516) wrote in a letter from 1488 that in Italy, on Yom Kippur and Hoshana Rabbah nights, the aron was opened after davening and women would come throughout the night to kiss the Torah. A nineteenth-century Lithuanian memoir describes white bread baked in the shape of a bird, reflecting the folk belief that on this day the final decree concerning life and death was being carried to Heaven.

Another well-known custom involved a woman expecting a child biting the *pitum* from an esrog after Sukkos and davening for an easier birth. The earliest source I have found for this is the

enormously influential Yiddish *Tz'ena U'rena* of Rav Yaakov ben Yitzchak Ashkenazi, first printed around the beginning of the seventeenth century and reprinted hundreds of times. These practices belong more to the history of Jewish custom and folk belief than to the central halachic identity of Hoshana Rabbah, but they show how deeply the idea of judgment became associated with the day.

Conclusion: Hoshana Rabbah is unusual precisely because there is no single source from which the day as we know it emerges fully formed. Its oldest layer is clear: the seventh day of the *aravah*, the seven circuits around the mizbei'ach, and *chavatah* are rooted directly in Chazal and in the Beis Hamikdash. Around that ancient foundation accumulated the nighttime Torah and Tehillim, customs reminiscent of Yom Kippur, and an increasingly explicit tradition that Hoshana Rabbah represents a final stage of judgment. Looking at the sources chronologically also helps explain why the day can seem to contain several different identities at once. It is *Yom Aravah*, preserving one of the most striking Temple practices of Sukkos. It is part of *zman simchaseinu*, with Hallel and the *daled minim*. Yet it also carries echoes of the Yamim Nora'im, with early rising, special tefillos, Tehillim, and traditions concerning the sealing of judgment. Those elements did not necessarily originate together, but over the centuries they became part of one remarkable day. Perhaps that is what makes Hoshana Rabbah so distinctive. The seriousness of judgment never entirely displaces the joy of Sukkos, and the joy of Sukkos never eliminates the urgency of the final plea. We continue to hold the lulav and say Hallel while circling the bimah seven times and repeatedly calling *hoshana*. At the very end of Sukkos, the different strands of the day come together in those two simple words: *hoshia na* – please save us.

Taken from sources listed at end of article.

Hoshana Rabbah: A Practical Halachic Guide

The following is a practical guide to the principal halachos and minhagim of Hoshana Rabbah..

1. Learning on Hoshana Rabbah Night

There is a longstanding custom to devote the night of Hoshana Rabbah to Torah study and prayer. The Mishnah Berurah (664:1) writes נהגים ישראל להיות נעורים כליל ערבה - *It is the custom of Israel to remain awake on the night of the Aravah*. However, as discussed in the preceding article, remaining awake the entire night is not necessarily an essential part of the custom.

The customary order, known as *Tikkun Leil Hoshana Rabbah*, includes reading Sefer Devarim, Midrash Rabbah on VeZos HaBerachah and Tehillim. Some communities recite the entire Sefer Tehillim collectively, accompanied by special prayers for forgiveness and a favorable judgment.

Those who remain awake throughout the night should follow the applicable halachos concerning *Birchos HaTorah* and *Birchos HaShachar* (See Mishnah Berurah 47:28–30).

There is also a practice to complete *Shnayim Mikra VeEchad Targum* for Parshas VeZos HaBerachah on Hoshana Rabbah (Birkei Yosef 285:4).

2. Davening on Hoshana Rabbah

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 664:1) states ביום שביעי שהוא הושענא רבה נוהגים להרבות במזמורים כמו ביום טוב - *On the seventh day, Hoshana Rabbah, it is customary to add the psalms recited on Yom Tov*.

According to the Ashkenazic custom, the additional *Pesukei*

DeZimrah of Shabbos and Yom Tov are recited, but *Nishmas* is omitted and *Mizmor LeSodah* is included. The Torah service includes *Ein Kamocha* and *Shema Yisrael*, as on Yom Tov. Full *Hallel* is recited, and the *Kaddish* following *Mussaf* is chanted with a Yom Tov melody (Rema and Mishnah Berurah 664:1–4).

The Rema (664:1) records additional customs reminiscent of Yom Kippur, including lighting extra candles, immersing in a *mikvah* before dawn and wearing a *kittel*. In many Ashkenazic communities, the *shaliach tzibbur* wears a *kittel*, and portions of the *davening* are chanted with the melodies of the *Yamim Noraim*. The congregation generally wears Shabbos or Yom Tov clothing (Mishnah Berurah 664:9).

The *Aruch HaShulchan* (664:11) describes the custom of increasing one's *tefillos* and supplications, particularly during the *Hoshanos*. Hoshana Rabbah is therefore an appropriate time to pray for forgiveness, health, livelihood and a favorable judgment. Although Yom Kippur remains the day specifically designated by the Torah for *kapparah*, Hoshana Rabbah is regarded as a further opportunity for *teshuvah* and *tefillah*, particularly in light of the tradition that it represents the final stage of the judgment begun on Rosh Hashanah.

3. The Seven Hakafos and Hoshanos

The Mishnah (Sukkah 45a) states בְּכָל יוֹם מְקִיפִין אֶת הַמְזֻבָּח פַּעַם אֶחָת וְאוֹתוֹ בְּכָל יוֹם מְקִיפִין אֶת הַמְזֻבָּח שִׁבְעַת פְּעָמִים - *Every day they would circle the Mizbeach once, but on the seventh day they would circle it seven times.*

In commemoration of this practice, seven *hakafos* are made around the *bimah* on Hoshana Rabbah instead of the single *hakafah* performed on the preceding days. The additional *Hoshanos* include extended prayers for Divine mercy, sustenance, rainfall and redemption.

The *hakafos* are generally performed while holding the *lulav* and the other three species. The Rema (664:3, 7) also records the custom of holding the separate *aravos* during the *hakafos*, although practices differ among communities.

4. Beating the Aravos

Following the *Hoshanos*, we perform the custom of *chibut aravah*, beating willow branches against the ground. The Gemara (Sukkah 44a) identifies the taking of the *aravah* outside the Beis HaMikdash as a *minhag nevi'im*. Consequently, no *berachah* is recited (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 664:2).

The *aravos* used for this purpose are separate from those in the *lulav*. The Shulchan Aruch (664:4) rules that a single branch with one remaining leaf is technically sufficient, although the Rema emphasizes that a more attractive *aravah* should be used in keeping with the principle of זֶה אֵלֵי וְאֶנְהוּ - *This is my G-d, and I will beautify Him* (Shemos 15:2).

The widespread custom is to use a bundle of five *aravos* and strike them against the ground five times. The Shulchan Aruch requires two or three strikes, while the custom of five strikes is recorded by later authorities. The Rema also records the practice of shaking the *aravos* before beating them.

Afterward, the *aravos* should be treated respectfully and not discarded in a degrading manner (Shulchan Aruch 664:8–9). Some have the custom of saving them to be used for another mitzvah, such as burning the *chametz* on Erev Pesach.

5. Untying the Lulav

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 664:1) records the custom of

untying the binding of the *lulav* on Hoshana Rabbah. However, the practice varies among communities. Some untie the binding around the *lulav* itself, while others loosen the bindings holding the three species together. Sephardim generally do not follow this custom (Chazon Ovadia, Sukkos, pp. 439–440). A person who wishes to untie the *lulav* should first fulfill the mitzvah of taking the four species.

6. The Festive Meal and the Custom of Kreplach

Although Hoshana Rabbah is associated with judgment, it is also customary to eat a festive meal. The *Aruch HaShulchan* (664:13) writes וגַּם נִהְגוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת סְעוּדַת יוֹם טוֹב בְּהוֹשַׁעֲנָא רַבָּא בְּמַאֲכָלִים טוֹבִים - *It is also customary to prepare a Yom Tov meal on Hoshana Rabbah, with special foods.*

Many Ashkenazim eat *kreplach*, as they do on Erev Yom Kippur and Purim. One explanation is that these are hidden holidays: they have a festive character even though ordinary work is not prohibited as on a full Yom Tov. The meat, traditionally associated with celebration, is therefore concealed within dough (Otzar Kol Minhagei Yeshurun, p. 186).

The meal should not be so substantial that it diminishes one's appetite for the evening meal of Shemini Atzeres, as the *Aruch HaShulchan* expressly cautions.

7. The Last Day in the Sukkah on Hoshana Rabbah

Hoshana Rabbah is the final day of the Torah's seven-day mitzvah of dwelling in the *sukkah*. Accordingly, it is the last day on which *Leishev BaSukkah* is recited. Outside Eretz Yisrael, the applicable halachos and customs concerning eating in the *sukkah* on Shemini Atzeres continue to apply, but without that *berachah*.

Although Hoshana Rabbah has additional prayers and festive customs, its halachic status remains that of *Chol HaMoed*, and the ordinary restrictions on work during *Chol HaMoed* apply. The Rema (664:1) also records the custom of refraining from ordinary work until after the morning *davening*.

Sources and Further Reading

Shulchan Aruch, Tur, Beis Yosef, Rema Mishna Berurah and Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Chaim 664. Chazon Ovadia, Sukkos, pp. 436–450. Nitei Gavriel, Hilchos Sukkos. R' Eliezer Brodt, *The Mysteries of Hoshana Rabbah*

Adapted and translated from

יָמֵינוּ by Rav Chaim Friedlander (1923–1986)

Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres: Teshuvah MeAhavah

Chazal view Shemini Atzeres as the conclusion of Sukkos. Rashi quotes the familiar mashal שקשה עלי פרידתכם - *Stay with Me one more day; your departure is difficult for Me* (Rashi to Bemidbar 29:35, based on Sukkah 55b). But Shemini Atzeres is also the conclusion of the Yamim Noraim. Rav Yisrael Salanter is quoted as saying מה שהסכל אינו משיג ביוהכ"פ בנעילה זוכה החכם בשמחה - *What the fool misses at Ne'ilah, the wise man can attain on Simchas Torah through joy*. Sukkos, and especially Simchas Torah, can therefore raise a person in *teshuvah* to a level comparable to Yom Kippur.

What is difficult to understand is the connection between these two ideas. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are days of judgment and *teshuvah*, while Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres are days of *simchah*. What is the particular *avodah* of Shemini Atzeres, and how does the joy of the day complete the work of the Yamim Noraim?

What Is the Avodah of Shemini Atzeres?

The Targum gives us a starting point. It renders *Atzeres* as כנישין - *a gathering* (Bemidbar 29:35). The Zohar similarly says וביומא דחדותא - *On the King's joyful day, all gather with Him*, and concludes עצרת חרגומו כנישו - *Atzeres means gathering* (Zohar, Emor 104a). Shemini Atzeres is a day on which we gather together to rejoice with the King.

But there is another meaning to this gathering. *Atzeres* means that we gather into ourselves, and hold onto, everything acquired during the Yamim Noraim. The Sfas Emes explains שמח והיית אך - *you shall be joyful* as an allusion to the twenty-one days from Rosh Hashanah through Shemini Atzeres, since אך has the numerical value twenty-one. The joy of Shemini Atzeres does not begin after the Yamim Noraim. It grows out of their twenty-one days of *avodah*. The day is called *Atzeres* because we now gather those gains together so that their effect can continue throughout the year (Sfas Emes, Sukkos, p. 97).

With this explanation, we can begin to understand why a day of *simchah* can also be the culmination of the days of judgment. The question is how the *avodah* of Sukkos prepares us for that culmination.

Sukkos: Protecting the Gains of the Yamim Noraim

Let us first review what is accomplished on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The *avodah* of Rosh Hashanah is built upon *Malchuyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofros*. *Malchuyos* is acceptance of Hashem's Kingship, and therefore Chazal say אמרו לפני מלכויות - *Recite Malchuyos before Me*, so that through saying them we renew His Kingship over ourselves. *Zichronos* teaches us the ways of Hashem's *Hashgachah*: *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* judges our deeds as part of our past and as what continues into our future. That knowledge itself awakens a person to *teshuvah*. *Shofros* teaches that the shofar demands judgment. When a person himself demands judgment, he can transform *Middas HaDin* into *Middas HaRachamim* and thereby merit the *kapparah* of Yom Kippur.

The difficulty is that a new level attained on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is still fragile. It has not yet become fixed in a person's soul, and the *yetzer hara* can easily cause him to fall from it. This is where Sukkos enters. After the Yamim Noraim we sit in the sukkah, *בצלל דמהימנותא* - *in the shade of faith*. The sukkah teaches us Hashem's constant *Hashgachah* and places us under His protection. The Zohar says כיון דיתבו בסוכות הא אשתזבו מן מקטרגא - *Those who sit in the sukkah are saved from the accuser* (Zohar, Ra'aya Mehemna, Emor 100b). The more we place ourselves under Hashem's guidance, the more *siyata diShmaya* we merit.

Sukkos does more than protect what we already achieved. Each of its seven days strengthens one of the seven *middos* through which *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* conducts creation. This is also the meaning of the seven *Ushpizin*, corresponding to the seven days of Sukkos (Zohar, Emor 103b). Each *Ushpiz* represents his particular *middah*, and on each day we try to attach ourselves to that *middah* and adopt Hashem's ways, becoming a *merkavah laShechinah*.

The four *minim* continue the same process. They too correspond to the seven *middos* (Ramban, Vayikra 23:40). Chazal say מוליך ומביא - *Out and in to stop harmful winds, up and down to stop harmful dews* (Sukkah 37b). Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin explains that *harmful winds* refers to harmful desires, which are rooted in the heart, the place of a person's *ruach*. *harmful dews* refers to false

wisdom and corrupt ideas. The pasuk חזל כטל אמרתי - *My teaching falls like dew* (Devarim 32:2) is associated here with Torah Shebe'al Peh. Dew descends almost without being noticed. In the same way, a person does not always sense the *siyata diShmaya* coming to him from Hashem, and he may likewise fail to notice harmful ideas seeping into his thinking. By moving the four *minim* in every direction, we protect ourselves against both harmful desires and harmful ideas (Pri Tzadik, p. 262).

The Hakafos: From Sur MeRa to Aseh Tov

This also explains the *hakafos* of Sukkos. Each day we circle the Sefer Torah with the four *minim*, and on Hoshana Rabbah we circle seven times. The *sefarim* compare these *hakafos* to Yehoshua's encircling of Yericho. For six days the city was circled once each day; on the seventh day it was circled seven times, and the wall fell. In the same way, through the seven *hakafos* of Hoshana Rabbah אנו מסירין את חומת הברזל בין ישראל לאבינו שבשמים - *we remove the iron wall between Yisrael and our Father in Heaven*. The purpose is to conquer the power of evil and strengthen *sur meRa*.

This is also the meaning of the Gemara's striking description of the lulav, דין גירי בעינא דשטן - *Arrows in Satan's eyes* (Sukkah 38a). Rashi explains that it pains the Satan to see that he has failed to detach us from the yoke of mitzvos. Sukkos is therefore a week in which the gains of the Yamim Noraim are protected and the forces that can undo them are pushed back.

What remains to be understood is why, after seven days of this *avodah*, we make *hakafos* again on Simchas Torah, but this time with the Sefer Torah itself. The answer is that *sur meRa* is only half of the task. Sukkos teaches us how to keep evil out; Simchas Torah teaches us what must take its place. We now turn from *sur meRa* to *aseh tov*, from defending ourselves against the *yetzer hara* to building *deveikus* in Torah.

Torah itself is the strongest means of building the power of *kedushah*. We therefore circle again on Simchas Torah, now holding the Sefer Torah, and pray אנה ה' הושיעה נא - *Please Hashem save us*. The goal is not merely that evil should remain outside, but that a wall of *kedushah* should be built within us. This is why Chazal established Simchas Torah on Shemini Atzeres. After the *sur meRa* of the Yamim Noraim and Sukkos, we can reach *aseh tov* through joyful *deveikus* in Torah.

So the Yamim Tovim of *Chodesh HaEisanim* are not separate experiences. They form one progression. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur begin the process of *teshuvah*. Sukkos protects and strengthens it through *sur meRa*. Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah complete it through *aseh tov* and *deveikus* in Torah.

A Second Path to Teshuvah

There is, however, another question. If the judgment of the Yamim Noraim reaches its conclusion on Hoshana Rabbah, what remains to be accomplished on Shemini Atzeres? The Zohar teaches that even then the door of *teshuvah* has not closed. If a person's *teshuvah* on Yom Kippur was not yet complete, תליין ליה עד ההוא יומא בתראה דעצרת - *his case is held until Atzeres, the eighth day*; if he then completes his *teshuvah*, אתקרו - *the decrees are torn* (Zohar, Vayechi 220b).

The Arizal goes even further. Although the decrees are handed over on the night of Hoshana Rabbah, הדבר תלוי עד יום שמי"ע אם יחזור בתשובה - *it still depends on teshuvah until Shemini Atzeres*. If a person returns with complete *teshuvah*, the decree can still be torn up (Pri Etz Chaim, Shaar HaLulav, end of ch. 4). The Recanati in Parshas

Shelach gives the example of a man who did not see his shadow, then returned in prayer and *teshuvah* and saw it restored.

How can Shemini Atzeres accomplish what was not accomplished during the days of awe? The answer is that there are two different roads to *teshuvah*. If we did not reach *teshuvah miYirah* during the Yamim Noraim, the mitzvos of Sukkos and *zman simchaseinu* can bring us, at least, to *teshuvah meAhavah*.

In one respect, *teshuvah* from love can be easier to reach than *teshuvah* from fear, because it can begin with *hakaras hatov*. The *Kochvei Or* relates that Rav Avraham Grodzinski asked Rav Yitzchak Blazer why his *shmuessen* so often emphasized gratitude to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* for the extraordinary kindness of accepting *teshuvah* and granting forgiveness. Rav Yisrael Salanter, by contrast, often aroused people through fear of punishment and the gravity of rebelling against Hashem's word (*Kochvei Or*, p. 147).

Rav Yitzchak Blazer answered that Rav Yisrael Salanter had reached perfection in *yirah*. It was said of him *מי שלא ראה את הגר"ס בימי אלול - לא ראה יראה מימיו* - *Whoever did not see Rav Yisrael in Elul never saw yirah*. Because he possessed that level, he could awaken others to *teshuvah* through *yirah*. We have not necessarily reached that level. Even if we can attain only a partial *teshuvah* through fear, reflection on *hakaras hatov* may enable us to reach a real measure of *teshuvah meAhavah*, through which sins can be transformed into merits.

With this we can understand the special opportunity of Shemini Atzeres. We have spent seven days *בציל דמהימנותא* - *in the shade of faith*, living with Hashem's protection, surrounded by mitzvos, and experiencing *zman simchaseinu*. Even if fear did not bring us all the way back, gratitude and joy can bring us to *teshuvah meAhavah*.

Ein Od Milvado: The Goal of Shemini Atzeres

One final point remains to be understood. Before the *hakafos* of Simchas Torah, Chazal instituted the recitation of *אתה הראית לדעת כי - Hashem is G-d; there is nothing else* (Devarim 4:35), and *ואמר ביום ההוא הנה אלקינו זה קוינו לו ויושיענו זה ה' - This is our G-d for whom we hoped; let us rejoice in His salvation* (Yeshaya 25:9). Why are these particular pesukim part of the *avodah* of Simchas Torah?

These pesukim describe the clarity that will exist in the future, when it will be recognized that there is no true deficiency in creation and that everything is directed according to Hashem's will. Chazal say *עתידי הקב"ה לעשות מחול לצדיקים והוא יושב ביניהם בגן עדן וכל אחד ואחד מראה באצבעו - Hakadosh Baruch Hu will form a circle for the tzaddikim, and each will point to Him, saying לו קוינו זה קוינו זה אלקינו זה ה' - This is our G-d* (Ta'anis 31a).

Rav Dessler, based on the Maharal in Be'er HaGolah, explains the significance of the circle. Every *tzaddik* has his own particular portion in *avodas Hashem*, but the service of all the *tzaddikim* together forms a complete whole. In a circle, each person ultimately comes to the place of his fellow. So too, in the future each *tzaddik* will see how his own *avodah* joined with the *avodah* of others to reveal Hashem's Oneness. From every point they will be able to say *זה אלקינו - This is our G-d* (Michtav MeEliyahu IV, p. 149).

This is the clarity of *אין עוד מלבדו - there is nothing besides Him*. Chazal say *אין עוד מלבדו אפילו בחללו של עולם - There is nothing besides Him anywhere in the world* (Devarim Rabbah 2:19). On Simchas Torah we can reach, in a limited measure, a taste of that future recognition. After the *teshuvah* of the Yamim Noraim, the *sur meRa* of Sukkos, and the *aseh tov* of Simchas Torah, a person can see more clearly that every part of his *avodah* belongs to one Divine plan.

This also explains the Zohar's description of Atzeres as a revelation of *Malchus* (Zohar, Pinchas 256b). The Zohar on *ולא עמד איש אתו - No one stood with him when Yosef revealed himself to his brothers* (Bereishis 45:1), understands the pasuk in one place as an allusion to Shemini Atzeres, when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is alone with Yisrael, and in another explanation as an allusion to the future (Zohar, Vayigash 208b). The revelation of Hashem's Oneness on Shemini Atzeres is therefore a small reflection of the revelation that will come in the future.

So now we can understand why the day is called *Atzeres*. At the end of Tishrei we are asked to gather everything together and hold onto it: the acceptance of Hashem's Kingship on Rosh Hashanah, the *teshuvah* of Yom Kippur, the protection and *sur meRa* of Sukkos, the joyful *aseh tov* and *deveikus* of Simchas Torah, and finally the recognition of *אין עוד מלבדו - there is nothing besides Him*. If those gains are gathered within us, Shemini Atzeres can complete the *teshuvah* of Tishrei as *teshuvah meAhavah* and carry its effect into the year ahead.

Adapted from

Moadim U'Zmanim, Siman 132

By Rav Moshe Shternbach

The Joy of Simchas Torah

The opening question. On Simchas Torah there is a basic question that requires explanation. We celebrate the completion of the Torah by singing, dancing, and rejoicing *לכבוד התורה - in honor of the Torah*. Yet the Gemara (Moed Katan 9a) establishes the rule *אין מערבין שמחה בשמחה - we do not mix one joy with another*. The festival itself already carries a *chiyuv* of *simchas hachag*. If so, why was the celebration of completing the Torah fixed specifically for Yom Tov? Why should the joy of the *siyum haTorah* be added to the independent joy of the festival?

This question is not easily avoided by saying that the prohibition of *מערבין שמחה בשמחה* applies only to marriage. Some *poskim* indeed distinguish a wedding from a *bris milah* or *pidyon haben* on the ground that the latter are *לא מיקרי שמחה - not regarded as a full halachic simchah*. But the celebration of completing the Torah would seem to present a stronger problem. We rejoice and dance with the *Sefer Torah* in a manner very much resembling the joy of a wedding. Indeed, Tosafos entertains the possibility that even a *seudah* of *pidyon haben* may fall under *שמחה בשמחה*. If so, the established practice of celebrating the completion of the Torah precisely on Shemini Atzeres - and in Eretz Yisroel on the very day of Shemini Atzeres itself - needs explanation.

What is simchas hachag? To answer this, we first have to define the nature of the mitzvah of *simchah* on Yom Tov. There are two ways to understand it. Perhaps the essential mitzvah is a general joy that HaKadosh Baruch Hu chose us from among the nations, gave us His Torah and mitzvos, and designated special times on which that inner joy is expressed outwardly through eating, drinking, and the other forms of *simchas Yom Tov*. According to this approach, the physical acts are the expression of a broader joy in Hashem and in our relationship with Him. Or perhaps the mitzvah is more specific: on each festival we must rejoice in the event that gives that day its particular character - on Pesach in *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, on Shavuot in *Matan Torah*, and on Sukkos in the Divine protection represented by the *Ananei HaKavod*. On this second understanding, it is not enough

merely to be happy on *Yom Tov*; the joy must be tied to the content of that particular day.

The Gemara in Pesachim. The Gemara (Pesachim 68b) seems to support this second possibility. It teaches הכל מודים בעצרת דבעינן נמי - *everyone agrees that on Shavuot there must also be a dimension of physical enjoyment because it is the day on which the Torah was given to Yisroel.* The Gemara does not merely say that *Shavuot* is a day of joy. It connects the form of the joy to the event of the day itself: because this is the day of *Matan Torah*, everyone agrees that לכם, physical enjoyment, is required. This suggests that *simchas hachag* is not an undefined state of happiness, but a joy rooted in what Hashem did for us on that day.

Rejoicing in the day or rejoicing in Hashem? On the other hand, the Midrash on Shir HaShirim appears to formulate the mitzvah differently. On the *pasuk* זה היום עשה ה' נגילה ושמחה בו, the Midrash asks איני יודע אם בו ביום או בהקב"ה תלמוד לומר נגילה ושמחה בכך - *I do not know whether the rejoicing is in the day or in HaKadosh Baruch Hu; therefore the verse teaches, we will rejoice and be glad in You.* This seems to say that the essence of the mitzvah is to rejoice in Hashem Himself. If so, why should *Shavuot* differ from any other *Yom Tov*? The answer may be that the two ideas are not contradictory. Every *Yom Tov* contains a general joy in Hashem, His *Torah* and His *mitzvos*; at the same time, each festival adds the particular event through which that relationship is revealed on that day. Thus on *Shavuot* there is the general joy in Hashem together with a special joy in the gift of the *Torah*. That additional dimension explains why the Gemara says that on *Shavuot* all agree that לכם is required.

We can now return to the original question. The rule of אין מערבין שמה בשמחה applies when one introduces a separate and independent *simchah* into the festival - a wedding, a *bris milah*, a *pidyon haben*, or the dedication of the *Beis HaMikdash*. These are distinct occasions of joy, and the question is whether they may be combined with *simchas hachag*. But rejoicing in the *Torah* is fundamentally different. The very foundation of *simchas hachag* is joy that HaKadosh Baruch Hu chose us and gave us His *Torah*. Therefore, when a Jew rejoices in the *Torah*, he is not bringing a foreign *simchah* into *Yom Tov*; he is expressing the *simchah* of the *Yom Tov* itself. As Chazal express the bond between Hashem and His *Torah* - קודשא בריך הוא ואורייתא חד הוא *HaKadosh Baruch Hu and the Torah are one.* The joy of *Torah* is therefore not a second joy competing with *simchas hachag*; it is one of its primary forms.

Why Shemini Atzeres? This is especially appropriate on *Shemini Atzeres*. Chazal describe the character of the day with the words עכבו עמי - *remain with Me.* After the days of *Sukkos*, HaKadosh Baruch Hu asks Klal Yisroel to remain for one final day of closeness. A festival whose essence is this intimate rejoicing with Hashem is precisely the proper setting for joy in His *Torah*. The earlier generations were therefore not establishing a second celebration on top of *Yom Tov* when they fixed the rejoicing of *Simchas Torah* for *Shemini Atzeres*. They were giving concrete expression to the very *simchas hachag* of the day.

The difficulty from Arachin. There is, however, a further issue. The *Emek Berachah* argues that a person may dance vigorously at the completion of the *Torah* and nevertheless fail to fulfill the mitzvah of *simchas hachag*. His starting point is the Gemara in *Arachin* (11a): מניין לעיקר שירה מן התורה רב מתנא אמר מהכא תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלקיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב איזוהי עבודה שבשמחה ובטוב לבב הוי אומר אין אדם שר אלא מתוך שמחה וטוב לבב דכתיב הנה רש"י explains זה שירה

a person sings only out of joy and gladness of heart. The Gemara then asks whether the verse might refer instead to words of *Torah*, since פקודי ה' ישרים משמחי לב; it answers משמחי לב פקודי ה' ישרים משמחי לב - *Torah is called something that rejoices the heart, but it is not called good.* The Gemara similarly considers *bikkurim*, about which the *pasuk* says ושמחת בכל הטוב, and answers that it is called טוב but not לבב טוב.

Three levels of simchah. The *Emek Berachah* understands this sugya as describing three levels. *Bikkurim* has *simchah* and טוב, but not לבב; *Torah* is משמחי לב but is not called טוב; song contains the full expression of שמחה וטוב לבב. He further notes that the Ramban, in his discussion of Hallel, treats song as included in the *Torah* obligation of festival joy, while the Rambam (Hilchos *Yom Tov* 6:17) writes שבעת ימי הפסח ושמונת ימי ההג עם שאר ימים טובים חייב אדם להיות בהן שמחה וטוב לב - *a person is obligated on the Yamim Tovim to be joyful and glad of heart.* From here the *Emek Berachah* concludes that the joy of *Torah*, which the Gemara calls only לב משמחי, does not by itself reach the level of לבב שמחה וטוב required for *simchas hachag*. Even the vigorous dancing with the *Sefer Torah*, on this view, is a special form of honor for the *Torah*, modeled on Dovid HaMelech being מפזז ומכרכר, but it does not transform the underlying joy into the halachic category of *simchas Yom Tov*.

What exactly is called only לב משמחי? This conclusion is difficult. The Gemara in *Arachin* is speaking about the joy produced by the study of *Torah* itself - דברי תורה - and it is that intellectual and spiritual joy that the *pasuk* describes as לב משמחי. But a person on *Simchas Torah* is not merely sitting and learning. He is singing, dancing, and rejoicing להטות התורה. The form of the *simchah* is itself the classic outward form of festival joy. There is no reason to say that because the object of his joy is the *Torah*, the dancing suddenly loses the quality of לבב טוב. The Gemara tells us that the experience of learning *Torah* is called לב משמחי; it does not say that every act of singing and dancing performed in honor of the *Torah* is excluded from שמחה וטוב לבב.

The intention is itself simchas hachag. There is an additional point. According to what we explained above, the very intention to rejoice in the *Torah* on *Yom Tov* is itself an intention of *simchas hachag*. The *Torah* is not an unrelated cause of happiness; joy in the *Torah* is one of the central forms of rejoicing in Hashem. One might ask that מצות צריכות כוונה - *mitzvos require intention* - and perhaps a person who thinks only of *Simchas Torah* has not intended to fulfill *simchas hachag*. But ordinarily a person who dances with the *Sefer Torah* on the festival is also rejoicing in the festival itself. If he expressly has in mind the mitzvah of *simchas hachag*, that is certainly preferable. Yet we do not find that on *Yom Tov* or *Chol HaMoed* every individual act that gives a person joy requires a separate declaration of intent to fulfill the mitzvah. The ordinary context of *Yom Tov* supplies that intent.

Conclusion. We can therefore understand why the celebration of the completion of the *Torah* was established on *Shemini Atzeres* and why it does not violate מערבין שמחה בשמחה. *Simchas Torah* is not a second *simchah* superimposed upon *simchas Yom Tov*. It reveals what *simchas Yom Tov* itself means: to rejoice in Hashem, in the relationship He created with Klal Yisroel, and in the *Torah* through which that relationship is expressed. On *Shemini Atzeres*, the day of עכבו עמי, our dancing with the *Sefer Torah* is therefore not a distraction from the joy of the festival. It is one of its clearest expressions.

V'ZOS HABRACHA:

Adapted from

הגיוני הלכה Vol. II, by Rav Yitzchak Mirsky

גמרה של תורה The Completion of the Torah

אני מאמין באמונה שלמה שכל התורה המצויה עתה בידינו היא הנתונה למשה רבנו - *I believe with complete faith that the entire Torah now in our possession is the Torah given to Moshe Rabbeinu*. This is one of the Thirteen Principles of Faith. Yet Chazal discuss one apparent exception: the final eight *pesukim* of the *Torah*, which describe Moshe after his death. The Gemara (Bava Basra 15a; Menachos 30a) records a dispute. Rabbi Yehudah says Yehoshua wrote them, because the *Torah* says וימת שם משה עבד ה' - *Moshe, the servant of Hashem, died there* (Devarim 34:5). - *Could Moshe still have been alive and have written that Moshe died?* Rabbi Shimon disagrees. Moshe had already commanded לקח את ספר - *Take this Sefer Torah* (Devarim 31:26), and a *Sefer Torah* could not have been missing even a single passage. Rabbi Shimon therefore says that Moshe wrote these verses too, but in a different manner: עד כאן הקב"ה אומר ומשה וכותב מכאן ואילך הקב"ה אומר ומשה - *Until this point HaKadosh Baruch Hu would say the words, Moshe would repeat them and write them; from this point onward HaKadosh Baruch Hu would say them and Moshe would write "bedema"*.

Why did Moshe ordinarily repeat the words before writing them? Rashi explains כתיבה שלא יטעה בכתב - *so that he would not make a mistake in the writing*. The Ritva explains that Moshe repeated Hashem's words out of his great love for them. Tosafos in Menachos derive a practical rule from Rashi: a *sofer* should say each word before writing it, so that he will not err. Moshe was, as it were, the *sofer* of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and this was the manner in which he wrote the *Torah*.

The final eight pesukim were different in two respects. Moshe did not repeat them before writing them, and the Gemara says that he wrote them בדמעה - *bedema*. Rashi effectively treats the two differences as one. Hearing the description of his own death brought Moshe to tears, and in his grief he could not repeat the words aloud before writing them. This avoids Moshe's saying an apparent falsehood, but one question remains: even if he did not say the words, how could he write them while they were still untrue?

The Maharsha understands bedema literally. Moshe's tears took the place of ink. He dipped his quill into his tears and wrote the final eight *pesukim*. Since writing in tears does not endure, it is not halachically regarded as *kesivah*. The Maharsha compares this to the Gemara in Gittin (19a), where a temporary tracing does not itself constitute valid writing.

But this explanation creates a serious difficulty. Rabbi Shimon's entire objection to Rabbi Yehudah was that the *Torah* could not have been incomplete when Moshe said לקח את ספר התורה הזה - *Take this Sefer Torah*. If the last eight *pesukim* were written only in tears, and such writing is not halachically enduring, the *Sefer Torah* would still appear to be missing them. The same principle appears in the laws of *Shabbos*: one who writes with a substance that does not endure does not incur the Biblical liability of *kosev* (*Shabbos* 104b). Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Halperin applied this principle in proposing temporary writing for necessary hospital instructions on *Shabbos*.

The Gra gives bedema an entirely different meaning. The word need not mean tears. The word can also refer to mixing, as in the Gemara's expression המדמע - one who mixes *terumah* into *chullin*. According to the Gra, בדמע therefore means that Moshe wrote the letters in a mixed, concealed arrangement.

This fits a deeper teaching concerning the *Torah*. Chazal teach that the *Torah* preceded creation, yet before creation there was no Egypt, no Flood, no Exodus, and none of the events later described in the *Torah*. The Zohar explains that the primordial *Torah* consisted of Names of HaKadosh Baruch Hu formed through hidden combinations of letters. The Ramban, in his introduction to the *Torah*, writes that Moshe received both forms: the revealed arrangement that we read today and the concealed arrangement of its letters.

With this explanation, the difficulty disappears. Moshe wrote the entire *Torah* in ink and did not omit a single letter. But he could not yet write the final words openly as וימת שם משה - *Moshe died there*. He therefore wrote those letters in their concealed arrangement. After Moshe's death, Yehoshua deciphered the concealed text and wrote the letters in the revealed form in which they appear before us. The *Ksav VeHaKabbalah* accordingly suggests that Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Shimon need not be completely opposed: Moshe wrote the letters in their hidden form, and Yehoshua produced their revealed form.

Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik – the Brisker Rav - offers another approach. Throughout the *Torah*, HaKadosh Baruch Hu spoke to Moshe, Moshe first transmitted the words orally to Klal Yisroel, and only afterward wrote them. The final eight *pesukim* could not follow that order, because they speak of Moshe's death in the past tense. Moshe therefore heard them and wrote them immediately, without first saying them to the people. This resembles Rav Chaim Soloveitchik's distinction between *Nevi'im* and *Kesuvim*. The prophecy of *Nevi'im* was first spoken and then written. In *Kesuvim*, the order was reversed: the prophecy was first committed to writing and afterward read from the text. The final eight *pesukim* likewise entered the written *Torah* before they could be spoken publicly.

How are these final pesukim read? The Gemara continues: שמונה - *The final eight pesukim of the Torah are read by a yachid*. Rashi understands this to mean that they are not divided between two *olim* but are read together by one *oleh*. The *Toras Chaim* questions this wording. If the Gemara simply meant one person rather than two, it could have said אחד קורא אותן - *one person reads them*. And if the point were merely not to interrupt the reading, the Gemara could have used the familiar language employed for the *tochachah*: אין מפסיקין בקללות אלא אחד קורא את כולן - *We do not interrupt the curses; one person reads them all* (*Megillah* 31b). This leads him toward the Rambam's very different interpretation.

Rabbeinu Meshulam and the Abarbanel focus on the reader himself. Tosafos cite Rabbeinu Meshulam that יחיד קורא אותן means the *oleh* reads these verses alone, without the *chazan* reading together with him. The Abarbanel explains the symbolism. Throughout the *Torah*, Hashem said the words and Moshe repeated them, so in our public reading two voices, the *oleh* and the *chazan*, may participate. But in the final eight *pesukim*, HaKadosh Baruch Hu alone said the words and Moshe did not repeat them. Since they were spoken by יחידו של עולם - *the Unique One of the world*, they too are read by a single voice.

Other Rishonim and Acharonim read the word yachid differently. The Rashash connects it to the practice of *Simchas Torah*, when a passage may be repeated for many *olim*: these final eight *pesukim* are read only once and are not repeated for another *oleh*. The Mordechai, cited by the Rema, understands *yachid* as the distinguished person in the congregation, ordinarily a *talmid chacham*. This became one basis for treating *Chasan Torah* as a special honor.

The Rambam understands yachid as the opposite of tzibbur. He rules שמונה פסוקים שבסוף התורה מותר לקרות אותם בבית הכנסת בפחות מעשרה - *The final eight pesukim of the Torah may be read in the synagogue with fewer than ten* (Hilchos Tefillah 13:6). The Raavad immediately asks: והציבור היכן הלכו? - where did the congregation go? The *Sefer HaManhig* presses the same point. If the reading began with a *minyan*, the ordinary rule already allows it to be completed when some people leave, so what is unique about these verses?

The Rogatchover answers that the final section is a new keriya. In *VeZos HaBerachah* he sees two separate readings, the first ending at ויעל משה - *Moshe ascended* (Devarim 34:1), and the second extending from there to the end of the *Torah*. A new *keriyah* would ordinarily require ten at its beginning. The Rambam therefore teaches that this concluding *keriyah*, because of its exceptional status, may begin even with fewer than ten. The Rogatchover uses the same concept to explain the *haftarah* of *Simchas Torah*. The Gemara gives *Shlomo stood* (Melachim I 8:22), while Tosafos record our practice of reading משה ויהי אחרי מות משה - *And it was after the death of Moshe* (Yehoshua 1:1). If *VeZos HaBerachah* contains two *keriyos*, each has its natural continuation: the earlier section of blessing corresponds to Shlomo's blessing, while the final unit, which completes Moshe's life and the *Torah*, corresponds to the opening of *Sefer Yehoshua*.

Why should the Rambam permit this reading without a minyan? Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik explains that throughout the *Torah*, Hashem spoke to Moshe, Moshe transmitted the words to Klal Yisroel, and then wrote them. Thus, before Moshe wrote each section, its words had already been transmitted to the *tzibbur*. According to this explanation, it was through that public transmission that what Moshe subsequently wrote acquired the status of *Torah*, and its reading therefore requires a *tzibbur*. The final eight *pesukim* were different: הקב"ה אומר ומשה כותב בדמה - *HaKadosh Baruch Hu says and Moshe writes bedema*. They were written before they could be spoken to the people, because Moshe could not publicly say וימת משה while he was still alive. Since these verses entered the written *Torah* without first passing through the *tzibbur*, they may also be read ביהידי - *by an individual*. Rav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik takes the idea one step further. Moshe's tears reflected the fact that, at that moment, these words had not yet acquired the full *shem Torah*, because unlike the rest of the *Torah*, they had not first been spoken to Klal Yisroel.

One final thought. The last eight *pesukim* are therefore much more than an unusual conclusion to the *Torah*. They reveal something fundamental about the transmission of *Torah* itself. Throughout Moshe's life, Hashem spoke to Moshe, Moshe transmitted those words to Klal Yisroel, and only then were they written into the *Torah*. At the very end, that order could no longer continue. Moshe could write the words, but he could not yet speak them to the people. The *Torah* thus concludes precisely at the point where Moshe's personal transmission comes to an end and the next stage, through Yehoshua, begins. Perhaps this is also why these

pesukim are such a fitting conclusion for *Simchas Torah*. Moshe Rabbeinu's life ends, but the *Torah* does not. We finish with וימת משה - *Moshe died there* (Devarim 34:5), and almost immediately begin again with בראשית ברא אלקים - *In the beginning G-d created* (Bereishis 1:1). The messenger changes, the generations change, but the *Torah* continues without interruption.

Collected, adapted and summarized from midrashim in:

אוצר המדרשים

Edited by Rav Naftali Greenbaum 2001

The Last Day of Moshe's Life A Midrashic Account of His Final Tefillos, His Death, and the Last Verses of the Torah

The *Torah* tells the story of Moshe's death in only a few *pesukim*. Moshe ascends Har Nevo, Hashem shows him Eretz Yisrael, and then we read: וימת משה עבד ה' בארץ מואב על פי ה' - *Moshe, servant of Hashem, died there in the land of Moav by the word of Hashem* (Devarim 34:5) Chazal saw within those few lines an entire final chapter of Moshe's life. Different Midrashim preserve different parts of the story: what Moshe saw from the mountain, how desperately he fought the decree, who could and could not take his *neshamah*, how Hashem Himself attended to his death, where Moshe was buried, and finally the extraordinary question raised by the *Torah* itself: if Moshe died here, who wrote the verses describing his death? The sources overlap. *Devarim Rabbah* gives the fullest dramatic account of Moshe's final hours. The *Sifrei* preserves other traditions, and the *Gemara* adds still others. Read together, they form one powerful story.

The Land Moshe Would See but Never Enter

ויאמר ה' אליו זאת הארץ אשר נשבעתי לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב לאמר - *Hashem said to him: This is the land that I swore to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov* (Devarim 34:4) The *Gemara* understands לאמר as giving Moshe a final mission. He was to tell Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov that the promise made to them had now been fulfilled. He would leave this world as the witness who could tell the Avos that their children had reached the promised land. (Berachos 18b.) The *Sifrei* expands the vision itself. Rabbi Akiva says that Hashem showed Moshe every region of Eretz Yisrael as though the land were spread before him upon a table. Rabbi Eliezer says that Hashem strengthened Moshe's eyes so that he could see from one end of the world to the other. (Sifrei Bamidbar 136; Yalkut Shimoni.) ושמע לא - *but you shall not cross over there* (Devarim 34:4) Moshe searched for some opening in the decree. If he could not enter as king, could he enter as an ordinary man? If not alive, then after death? The *Sifrei* answers with striking finality: לא מלך ולא הדיוט לא חי - *not as a king and not as a private man, not alive and not dead* (Sifrei Devarim 357.)

The Tefillah That Shook Heaven

Devarim Rabbah turns Moshe's final day into a struggle between his *tefillah* and an irreversible decree. Moshe fasted, clothed himself in sackcloth and ashes, drew a circle around himself and refused to leave it until the decree was annulled. His prayer shook heaven and earth. Creation wondered whether Hashem was about to remake the world. Hashem ordered the gates of heaven closed against Moshe's *tefillah*, because the decree had already been sealed. Yet the prayer continued forcing its way upward. *Devarim Rabbah* describes it: תפלתו דומה לחרב שהיא קורעת וחונתכת - *his prayer was like a sword that tears and cuts* The Midrash says that Moshe prayed 515 times, corresponding to the numerical value of ואתחנן. Even after all those

tefillos, the decree remained. (Devarim Rabbah 11:10.) ברוך כבוד ה' - *Blessed is the glory of Hashem from His place* (Yechezkel 3:12) The heavenly beings saw that even Moshe would receive no special treatment. His life would not be extended and he would not enter Eretz Yisrael. Their response was an acknowledgment that there is no favoritism before Hashem, not even for Moshe. (Devarim Rabbah 11:10.) Moshe then made another argument. For forty years he had carried Yisrael, struggled until faith, Torah and mitzvos were firmly established among them, and shared their suffering. Surely he should now be allowed to see their good. ביומו תתן שכרו - *You shall give him his wages on that day* (Devarim 24:15) Was this the reward for forty years of labor? (Devarim Rabbah 11:10.)

Moshe Asks Only to Remain Alive

When entry into Eretz Yisrael was denied, Moshe reduced his request. If he could not enter the land, perhaps Hashem would at least permit him to remain alive somewhere in this world. The requests become almost painfully modest. Let him live like an animal of the field, eating grass and drinking water. Let him live like a bird, flying through the world and returning to its nest at night. Each time the answer is: רב לך - *It is enough for you*. Another form of the plea preserved in the anthology makes the request smaller still: Moshe asks to retain even some limited contact with this world. Again the answer is רב לך. The Moshe who once asked to lead Yisrael into its land is now asking only to remain in Hashem's world in any form at all. (Devarim Rabbah 11:10 and parallel tradition in the anthology.) *The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice; a G-d of faithfulness without injustice, righteous and upright is He* (Devarim 32:4) When Moshe finally understands that the decree will not change, the struggle gives way to acceptance. That movement, from repeated *tefillah* to acceptance of the Divine judgment, is central to Devarim Rabbah's account.

Samael Waits

The wicked one watches the tzaddik and seeks to kill him (Tehillim 37:32) While Moshe prays, Samael waits for him. Devarim Rabbah sets them at opposite extremes: none among the accusing forces is as wicked as Samael, and none among the prophets is as righteous as Moshe. Samael waits for the moment when Michael will mourn and he will rejoice. אל תשמחי איבתי לי כי - *Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; though I have fallen, I will rise; though I sit in darkness, Hashem is my light* (Michah 7:8) Michael answers that Moshe will die, but Yisrael will not end. Yehoshua will arise after him, and even later periods of darkness will not be the end of Yisrael. (Devarim Rabbah 11:10.)

The Angels Will Not Take Moshe's Neshamah

As Moshe's final moment approaches, Hashem tells Gavriel to bring Moshe's soul. Gavriel refuses. Moshe is equal in spiritual weight to the six hundred thousand of Yisrael, and he cannot bear even to witness his death. Hashem sends Michael, who also refuses. Only then is Samael sent. He comes clothed in anger and carrying his sword, but when he sees Moshe sitting with the *Shem HaMeforash* before him, his face shining like the sun, Samael himself trembles. אין שלום אמר ה' לרשעים - *There is no peace, says Hashem, for the wicked* (Yeshayahu 48:22) Samael says that he has come to take Moshe's soul. Moshe tells him that he will not take it. (Devarim Rabbah 11:10.)

Who Else Has Lived Such a Life?

Moshe answers Samael by recounting his life. The mouth destined to speak with the Shechina would not nurse from an Egyptian woman. At eighty he returned to Egypt, performed the signs and wonders, brought Yisrael out, split the sea, sweetened the waters of Marah, ascended into heaven, contended with angels, received a Torah of fire and spoke with Hashem פנים אל פנים. He fought Sichon and Og and wielded the staff engraved with the sacred Name. Who among all those born into this world, Moshe asks, has done these things? Samael retreats. When he returns with his sword, Moshe strikes him with the staff bearing the sacred Name and drives him away. The message of the Midrash is striking: the Angel of Death cannot conquer Moshe. But Moshe cannot overturn the decree of Hashem. (Devarim Rabbah 11:10.)

The Final Moment

The time of your death has arrived A bas kol announces that the final moment has come. Moshe makes one last request. He recalls the burning bush and Har Sinai. Above all, he asks not to be placed into the hands of the Angel of Death. This request is granted. Hashem Himself will come for him. Moshe sanctifies himself. Hashem descends together with Michael, Gavriel and Zagzagel. Moshe is instructed to close his eyes, place his hands upon his chest and draw his feet together. He obeys. The struggle has ended. (Devarim Rabbah 11:10.)

The Neshamah Refuses to Leave

Yet there is one final refusal, and this time it comes not from Moshe but from his own *neshamah*. Hashem tells the soul that its 120 years in Moshe's body are complete and that the time has come to leave. The soul protests. Is there another body as pure as Moshe's? It has lived within him for 120 years and does not wish to leave. Hashem promises to place the soul beneath the *Kisei HaKavod* among the heavenly hosts. Still the *neshamah* resists. *He took it only with a kiss* Hashem Himself takes Moshe's soul. Avos DeRabbi Nasan describes Hashem taking the soul and concealing it beneath the *Kisei HaKavod*, and the Gemara *Moed Katan 28a* likewise understands על פי ה' as death בנשיקה - by a kiss. Thus Moshe does not die at Samael's hand. His death is *misas neshikah*.

Creation Mourns

Who will rise for Me against evildoers; who will stand for Me against workers of iniquity (Tehillim 94:16) The Midrash does not confine the mourning to Yisrael. Heaven, earth, the sun and moon, and the heavenly orders all mourn Moshe. Yehoshua searches for his *rebbe* and cannot find him.

But wisdom, where shall it be found, and where is the place of understanding (Iyov 28:12) Avos DeRabbi Nasan preserves a particularly haunting continuation. The Angel of Death himself searches for Moshe and cannot find him. He asks the sea, the mountains, Sheol and Avadon. Each remembers Moshe, but none knows where he has gone. *The deep says: It is not in me; the sea says: It is not with me* (Iyov 28:14) *G-d understands its way and He knows its place* (Iyov 28:23) Hashem has hidden Moshe for the World to Come. Even Yehoshua continues searching until Hashem tells him: משה עבדי מת - *Moshe My servant is dead* (Yehoshua 1:2) (Devarim Rabbah 11:10; Avos DeRabbi Nasan 12)

The Hidden Grave

ויקבר אתו בגי בארץ מואב מול בית פעור ולא ידע איש את קברתו עד היום הזה - *He buried him in the valley in the land of Moav, opposite Beis Peor,*

and no man knows his burial place to this day (Devarim 34:6) The Gemara in Sotah focuses on the paradox. The Torah appears to identify the location and yet insists that no one can find it. A foreign authority sent men to locate Moshe's grave. Those standing above saw it below; when they went below, it appeared above. They divided into two groups, but each group saw the grave where the other group was standing. ולא ידע איש את קברו - *No man knows his burial place* (Devarim 34:6) אף משה רבינו עצמו אינו יודע היכן קבור - *Even Moshe Rabbeinu himself does not know where he is buried* Why was he buried מול בית פעור - opposite Beis Peor? כדי לכפר על - *to bring kapparah for the sin of Peor* Even in death, Moshe remains opposite the place of Yisrael's sin. (Sotah 13b-14a; Sifrei.)

There was No Prophet Like Moshe

Moshe fought with every power he possessed to remain alive. He prayed until heaven trembled. He offered forty years of service as his claim. He was willing to live as an animal or a bird rather than leave Hashem's world. Gavriel would not take his soul, Michael would not take it, and Samael could not take it. Even Moshe's own *neshamah* refused to leave him. In the end, no created being defeated Moshe. Hashem Himself took him - *with a kiss*, buried him, concealed his grave, and preserved his soul beneath the *Kisei HaKavod*. And the Torah closes not simply by telling us that Moshe died, but by telling us who Moshe was: ולא קם נביא עוד בישראל כמשה - *No prophet arose again in Yisrael like Moshe, whom Hashem knew face to face* (Devarim 34:10) A Midrashic reading makes this Hashem's own answer to Moshe's life's work. Moshe had spent his life teaching: וידעת היום והשבת אל לבבך כי ה' - *You shall know today and take it to heart that Hashem is G-d in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other* (Devarim 4:39) Moshe had proclaimed: אין עוד - *there is no other*. Hashem responds measure for measure: ולא קם נביא עוד בישראל כמשה - *No prophet arose again in Yisrael like Moshe* Moshe had spent his life proclaiming the uniqueness of Hashem. The Torah ends by proclaiming the uniqueness of Moshe. (Devarim Rabbah 11:8.

Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>

subject: Rav Kook on Vezot Habracha: A Torah of Fire
Vezot Habracha: A Torah of Fire

"God came from Sinai... He brought them a Law of fire from His right hand." (Deut. 33:2)

Why is the Torah called Eish-Dat, a "Law of fire"? And what does it mean that the Torah came from God's "right hand"?

God's 'Right Hand'

The right hand is ordinarily the stronger arm. The metaphor of God using His "right hand" to transmit the Torah indicates that the true power and foundation of the universe lie, not in the physical world, but in its spiritual side.

The relative importance of the world's spiritual reality may appear counterintuitive, but it can be better understood by considering, by way of analogy, the relative strength of human intellect and spirit compared with brute physical force. The Torah is rooted in the more powerful realm of the spiritual — God's "right hand."

The Clarity of Moses' Prophecy

Furthermore, these poetic metaphors of *aish-dat* and God's "right hand" convey the unique clarity of Moses' prophecy. Moses' prophetic visions were more precise and purer than those of any

other prophet. The Sages wrote that Moses saw through an *aspaklaria me'ierah*, a 'clear lens.' What does this mean?

Prophecy is ordinarily attained through a combination of two faculties: the intellect and imagination. Prophets need images and parables in order to grasp and then transmit their prophetic messages. Moses' prophecy, on the other hand, was based solely on intellect. His prophecy was perceived through a 'clear lens,' without the murky vision of the imagination (Guide to the Perplexed, II:36). For this reason, the Torah of Moses is called *Eish-Dat*, a 'Law of fire.' His prophecy came from pure intellect, like a blazing fire that purges and removes all impurities.

When Ezekiel described his prophetic experience, he said, "God's hand was upon me" (37:1). Unlike Moses, Ezekiel did not speak of the right hand. In fact, he specifically meant the left hand. Ezekiel utilized his powers of imagination — the weaker, less distinct 'left side' — in order to grasp his prophetic vision.

The Torah of Moses, on the other hand, was based on the more powerful right side. It flowed solely from the strength and clarity of Moses' cognitive powers. His unique Torah was thus a "Law of fire from his right hand."

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from: RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack <riets@substack.com>

On the Faith of Sukkot, a Rainy Sukkah, and the Flight from Dubai -- Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

Sep 30

The sukkah is described by the Zohar as the *tzila d'meheimanuta*, the "shade of faith", and faith is indeed a theme that permeates the festival of Sukkot. On one level it is apparent why that is so: the Jews are told over the course of this week to leave their formal, sturdy homes and take up residence in huts that, by definition, are temporary and permeable. To dwell in them is seemingly to abandon material protection and to turn to the arms of God.

However, the exposure that one undertakes in the sukkah is, in fact, greatly limited. When that exposure becomes a source of distress, the dweller is termed a "mitztaer" and is now exempt from remaining within the sukkah's confines. If it is raining, the sukkah is abandoned. According to some rabbinic voices, it actually loses its status as a sukkah in the first place. The faith displayed by the braving of the elements does not seem to go very far at all.

The faith of the sukkah, however, does not need to translate into self-affliction. The point is not to undergo an ordeal of genuine deprivation; when it is clear that the sukkah has become demonstrably inhospitable, one is permitted to leave, "teshvu k'ein taduru". The faith demanded is of a different nature.

The assumption that a formal, established house is safer than a hut is not absolute. It reflects only the most statistically likely possibilities. Under most circumstances one is more protected inside the house than inside the hut; however, this is not true in all circumstances. For example, if the structure itself were to collapse, those inside a house would, God forbid, be more endangered than those inside a hut. If a dangerous gas were to be released, it would be more threatening inside a closed house than in a permeable sukkah.

These are unlikely scenarios, and it is rational to assume that the house is the more protected location. At the same time, it is also rational to acknowledge that neither possibility is guaranteed to be superior to the other, as there are always circumstances that could thwart that premise.

All year round, the rational actor chooses the location that is most likely to offer the most protection. For one week a year, on Sukkot, we choose to show the world that, as wise and responsible as that is, we are still aware that ultimately we do not control our fate. There is a higher power to whom we declare our devotion and recognize as the true Arbiter of what will happen. When the circumstances of the moment dictate a different path, when the rain in the sukkah makes the house the clear choice, that is the appropriate path to follow. But when one is trying to anticipate how to plan for the future, assessing the statistical likelihood of one event or the other, Sukkot is the time to turn away from cool logic and into the hands of God.

The dramatic events of this morning's averted hijacking of a plane traveling from Dubai to Israel merged magnificent heroism from multiple individuals with miraculous providence. The numerous ways in which statistical likelihood was upended have been listed by many.

One detail deserves particular consideration. Twenty five years ago, on September 11, 2001, terrorists were able to bring down airplanes because they invaded the cockpit. Following that awful day, new steps were taken to reinforce and insulate the cockpits of airplanes to ensure that they could not be breached from the cabin. Given what was learned on that day, it was a wise and prudent move that was most likely to prevent another hijacked plane from being brought down.

On flight FZ1073, the circumstances were unexpectedly reversed. The terrorists were inside the cockpit, which was locked in a way that would have prevented the rescuers from entering, sealing the fate of everyone aboard. The wise and prudent step was the exact opposite of what was necessary under these circumstances.

The heroism of pilot Smit Machchhar, who, despite his grievous injury after having been stabbed by his co-pilot, found the strength and presence of mind to unlock the cockpit, was awe-inspiring. Indeed, awe is the appropriate reaction to the events in their totality, as human bravery, ingenuity, and altruism were enabled by divine providence to reverse a circumstance of near-certain doom, a happy ending as statistically unlikely as the event itself.

Tonight, as we recite a blessing to the God who commanded dwelling in the sukkah throughout this week, it would be worth pausing to lift one's eyes and look past the schach at the exposed sky, and ponder how the story that just unfolded there reminds us to look even higher than that.