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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON SHEMINI ATZERES – VZOS HABRACHA - 5786

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date: Oct 12, 2025, 10:15 AM

subject: **Tidbits - Shemini Atzeres 5786 in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz zt"l**

Shemini Atzeres 5786

Hoshana Raba On Leil Hoshana Rabbah, many have a custom to stay up late, and some through the night, learning Torah and davening. Many gather in shul to hear Mishneh Torah (the entire Sefer Devarim) leined • Hoshana Rabbah is an auspicious day - the final chance to influence the divine judgment of the Yomim Nora'im. It is customary to wish one another Ah Gut Kvittel or Piska Tava, referring to the 'good note' of the final judgment • During Shacharis, the Pesukei D'Zimra of Shabbos is said, with the addition of Mizmor Lesodah, and the exclusion of Nishmas. The Shliach Tzibbur wears a kittel • Many have the minhag to remove the upper rings from the lulav. Some do this even before reciting the berachos on the lulav, others before Hallel and some before Hoshanos • Seven hakafos of Hoshanos are performed, encircling the Sifrei Torah held at the bimah. Following hakafos, there is a Minhag Nevi'im of Chibbut Aravos, to klapp (bang) a bundle of five aravos on the ground. There is no need to bang any leaves off. Women should recite some of the hoshanos and perform Chibbut Aravos. Some shake the bundle to the six directions (like the lulav) prior to banging them. It is permissible to reuse a set of Aravos, provided that some leaves remain • As Hoshana Rabbah is a Yom Tov, one should have a proper Yom Tov meal. Since it is also Erev Yom Tov (Shemini Atzeres), the meal should be held before tesha sha'os (the end of the 9th halachic hour of the day, approximately 3:31 PM in NYC). Many have the custom to eat kreplach during this meal • The final opportunity for reciting Tashlich is on Hoshana Rabbah.

As Yizkor is said on Shemini Atzeres, many have the custom to light a Ner Neshamah on Hoshana Rabbah before dark. Additionally, as a new fire may not be lit on Yom Tov, a two-day candle is commonly lit to have a source for Hadlakas Neiros on the second night, as well as for other permitted Yom Tov uses.

Daf Yomi - Hoshana Rabbah: Bavli: Zevachim 29 • Yerushalmi: Shekalim 51 • Mishnah Yomis: Menachos 10:6-7 • Oraysa (this week): Chagiga 11a-13a • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 100:5-10

Be sure to show appreciation for all those who helped prepare for Yom Tov. Also, one should take the opportunity on Erev Yom Tov to call one's parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbe to wish them a Gut Kvittel and Chag Sameach.

Shemini Atzeres One may not prepare on Shemini Atzeres for the night of Simchas Torah. As such, preparations for this second night of Yom Tov may not begin until nightfall (tzeis hakochavim).

Shehecheyanu is recited on Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah. One who inadvertently said "Chag HaSuccos" instead of "Yom HaShemini Chag HaAtzeres" in Shemoneh Esrei or in Bircas Hamazon need not repeat it • Some (primarily Nusach Sefard) have the minhag to perform an abridged hakafos on Leil Shemini Atzeres • There are different opinions regarding eating in the succah. Regardless, the berachah of Leishev is not said and the stringency of limiting all eating (non-mezonos) to the succah is relaxed. The prevalent minhag is not to sleep in the succah • For the seudos, honey and round chalos are used for the final time on Shemini Atzeres • Some are stringent and discourage marital relations on Leil Shemini Atzeres except for a leil tevilah (many extend this to Leilei Hoshana Rabbah and Simchas Torah as well) • Yizkor is recited following Kerias Hatorah • A tefillah of Yetziah Min HaSuccah is said on Shemini Atzeres afternoon

Tefillas Geshem. We begin saying Mashiv Haruach u'Morid HaGeshem during Mussaf of Shemini Atzeres. In a shul where the Gabbai announces "Mashiv Haruach u'Morid HaGeshem" before the silent Mussaf Shemoneh Esrei (the minhag amongst Nusach Ashkenaz), an individual must say it in his quiet Shemoneh Esrei (even though the Sheliach Tzibbur has not yet said Tefillas Geshem). If the Gabbai makes no such announcement (i.e. a Nusach Sefard Shul) an individual does not say Mashiv Haruach. One who forgets Mashiv Haruach when it was called for, and also does not say Morid Hatal (i.e. Nusach Ashkenaz) needs to repeat Shemoneh Esrei. If one realizes his error before beginning "Atah Kadosh," he may immediately say "Mashiv Haruach..." and continue "Atah Kadosh" etc. If one is unsure if he said the correct formula, for the first 90 Tefillos we assume he followed what he was accustomed to and did not say Mashiv Haruach (the 90th tefillah will be Shacharis on Tuesday, November 11th). If one repeats the phrase "Mechayei meisim attah rav l'hoshia mashiv haruach u'morid hageshem" 90 times, he is halachically presumed to be accustomed to saying it properly and therefore would not repeat if unsure.

LeDavid is recited on Shemini Atzeres for the final time.

Bircas Kohanim takes place during Shacharis instead of Mussaf (Chalom Chalanti and Yehi Ratzon are omitted). If one is offered the opportunity to hold a Sefer Torah during hakafos it is considered disrespectful to decline this honor. However, after holding the Sefer for a bit one may offer the honor to another person.

KIBBUDIM:

Many shuls auction off these honors:

Evening Hakafos: Atah Hareisa, Chazzanus [and Neiros] at the Hakafos, Pesicha, Hotza'ah V'Hachnasa, 3 or 5 Aliyos, Hagbahah/Gelilah.

Daytime Hakafos: - Atah Hareisa, Chazzanus and Neiros at the Hakafos, 4 Aliyos, 5th Aliyah - Kol Hane'arim, Chasan Torah (the final aliyah in Sefer Devarim), Chasan Bereishis (the aliyah which begins Sefer Bereishis), Maftir, Hagbahah and Gelilah for each of the three Sifrei Torah.

The aliyah of Chasan Torah is considered by many to be the most prestigious, with the Chasan Bereishis second in prestige. Many value Kol Hane'arim as a segulah to have children. For these three aliyos, in many shuls all gather around the bimah and talleisim are spread over those assembled. In many shuls Hamalach hagoel is said after the aliyah of Kol Hane'arim. The minhag is for every person to receive an aliyah (minimum age of oleh varies based on individual shul policy) before the official five aliyos and Chasanei Torah and Bereishis are leined.

Kriyas Hatora

Shemini Atzeres: We lein five aliyos (Devarim 14:22-16:17) that discuss the Yamim Tovim. Maftir is the korbanos mussaf of the day (Bamidbar 29:35-30:1). The haftarah describes Shlomo Hamelech's berachos for the nation at the culmination of the Chanukas Habayis of the first Beis Hamikdash (Melachim Alef 8:54-9:1). This took place on Shemini Atzeres. Simchas Torah: At night, three (or five) aliyos are leined from Parashas V'zos Haberachah. During the day, we lein Parashas V'zos Haberachah in six aliyos, completing Chamishei Chumshei Torah. We then begin the Torah anew, by leining one aliyah that includes the 7 days of Creation, from the beginning of Bereishis (1:1-2:3). Maftir is the korbanos Mussaf of the day (Bamidbar 29:35-30:1). The haftarah is the beginning of Sefer Yehoshua (1:1-18). After leining about Moshe Rabbeinu's passing in Parashas V'zos Haberachah, we continue describing his disciple, Yehoshua, and his rise to leadership. With every sunset, Klal Yisrael recognizes the dawn of its divinely appointed new leader.

V'ZOS HABERACHAH: Moshe Rabbeinu blesses each Shevet individually • Blessings for Bnei Yisrael as a whole • Hashem shows Moshe the land of Eretz Yisrael from afar • Moshe Rabbeinu's passing; his burial place remains unknown • Klal Yisrael mourns for thirty days • Moshe's greatness and supremacy in prophecy • Chazak! Chazak! Venis' chazeik! BEREISHIS: The Seven Days of Creation. Day 1 - the world as a whole, and the creation of light and dark (day and night) • Day 2 - the separation of waters, leaving sky in between • Day 3 - earth and seas, vegetation, and seeds • Day 4 - sun, moon and stars • Day 5 - fish and birds • Day 6 - animals of the land, Adam (and Chavah) • Day 7 - blessed and holy rest Isru Chag Tachanun is not said on Isru Chag. Some do not say Tachanun until after Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan.

For the Yom Tov Table -

The Rambam writes that, aside from a person's responsibility for his own Simchas Yom Tov, he must ensure the Simchas Yom Tov of his wife and children. Furthermore, the Rambam writes one that must ensure the Simchas Yom Tov of the needy such as widows and orphans as well (Hilchos Yom Tov 6:18). The Rambam writes further: "But someone who locks the doors of their house, eating and drinking with their children and spouse [alone], and doesn't provide food or drink to the poor and depressed, is not participating in the joy of Hashem's commandments but rather the joy of his stomach, and about them it says, "their sacrifices are like bread for the dead; all who eat of them will become impure, for their food is for themselves" (Hoshea 9:4)"

As the Rambam writes this Halacha as part of the laws of Yom Tov, and not as part of Hilchos Tzedakah, it is clear that one fails to fulfill his personal Simchas Yom Tov obligation by falling short in donating to the poor! How so? Additionally, what is the meaning of the Rambam's comparison of selfish indulgence to sacrificing flawed Korbanos?

Rav Yitzchok Feigelstock zt"l explains that the simcha of Yom Tov celebrates our closeness and unique relationship with Hashem which is derived from a person being a part of Am Yisrael. Therefore, its celebration isn't possible as an individual, rather only as a nation in its entirety. We must ensure the celebration of those around us to properly fulfill this mitzvah. Furthermore, the concept of a korban is that one is coming closer to Hashem and it is as if one is sacrificing himself. If a donor is unfit and fails to seek to come closer to Hashem, the korban is mere food and lacks its holy essence. So too, if the Simchas Yom Tov lacks its essence - a unified celebration together with Hashem's nation - it remains mere frivolity and not a holy celebration of unity. Shemini Atzeres is the climax of Succos and the season of Z'man Simchaseinu. The simcha is complete when we celebrate b'achdus and show how special we are as a nation and our pride in our endearment to Hashem. Please reach out to us with any thoughts or comments at: klalgovoah.org

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THE MYSTERY OF THE FINAL VERSES OF THE TORAH, AND THE MESSAGE OF CHATAN TORAH FOR OUR TIMES Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

Autobiographies rarely include a description of the author's death and funeral, a challenge generally beyond even the most talented writer. It is thus that the Talmud (Bava Batra 15a, Menachot 30a) notes the anomaly of the last eight verses in the Torah, which describe the death of Moses. How, considering that Moses was the Torah's transcriber, could this section be included?

The Talmud records two opinions on the matter: According to one view, these verses were actually written by Joshua. According to the second opinion, while most of the Torah was dictated by God, with Moses repeating the dictation and recording, these last eight verses were dictated to Moses, who wrote them down "bidema". This last word is usually translated as "with tears", suggesting that Moses was weeping as he recorded the details of his own impending death.

However, the Vilna Gaon, in his Aderet Eliyahu, raises a different possible translation for "bidema", one that draws on the relationship to the word *dimua*, connoting "mixture" (a similar interpretation is cited by the M'lo haRoim in the name of the Rama mi-Fanu). The idea would be that Moses recorded this part of the Torah in an unintelligible mixture of letters not divided into words. After Moses actually died, the letters were organized by Joshua into words. Thus, the two opinions in the Talmud would actually be in agreement with each other, as the last verses were written first by Moses, *bidema*, and later by Joshua. (R. Mordechai Gifter takes issue with this approach, and modifies it somewhat; see *Pirkei Torah*, vol. 2, p. 334-340.)

In any event, these verses are unique, and thus the Talmud ascribes to them a unique halakhic status: "yachid korei otam". The meaning of this phrase, that they are read "yachid", is the subject of a major disagreement among authorities, with no fewer than five possibilities expressed.

A) According to a number of commentaries (Rashi to Bava Batra; Ri Migash cited in Shittah Mikubetzet to Bava Batra; Rabbenu Tam, in Tosafot to Bava Batra, s.v. *shemonah*), "yachid" means the aliyah should be read as one unit, without being broken up. B) A second view (first opinion cited in Shittah Mikubetzet, *ibid*) maintains that these verses should be read as their own aliyah, so that the words of Joshua would be appropriately distinguished from those of Moses. Thus, "yachid" would mean "apart". C) Rabbenu Meshulam was of the understanding that the reference was to the practice of having an appointed Torah reader read along with the *oleh*; for this section, that practice should be abandoned. Thus, "yachid" would mean "alone". Rabbenu Tam objected to this interpretation, implying that the practice referred to, instituted so as not to embarrass an *oleh* who would not be capable of reading from the Torah, was not in effect in the time of the Talmud and could thus not have been the intended subject. Nonetheless, the Toldot Yitzchak al haTorah (Parashat V'Zot HaBerachah) records that the custom in Provence was in accordance with the view of Rabbenu Meshulam.

D) Much of the discussion of this topic has centered on the opinion of Maimonides. In his *Mishneh Torah* (Hilkhot Tefilah 13:6.), he interprets "yachid" as contrasted with "tzibbur" (See also *Torat Chaim* to Bava Batra), ruling that these verses can be read without a minyan. The Ra'avad, however, was astonished at this interpretation. After citing some of the other views mentioned above as more plausible, he concludes simply, "where did the tzibbur go?"

The Kessef Mishneh questions the Ra'avad's difficulty, noting that it is certainly conceivable that either there was no minyan to begin with, or that part of the minyan left. Of course, with the modern observance of Simchat Torah being what it is, this is a more likely possibility than any other time of the year.

A number of contemporary authors (See R. Ya'akov Betzalel Zolty, *Mishnat Ya'avetz* (Orach Chaim, 72); R. Shlomo Wahrman, *Orot Chag haSukkot*, 59 and *Sh'erit Yosef*, 4:32; R. Mordechai Ilan, *Masa Yad* (Vol. 1, Parashat V'Zot HaBerachah)) explain that the Ra'avad's question actually refers not to a physical reality but a halakhic one. In consideration of the

halakhah (see Megilah 23b; Tosafot s.v. ein, citing the Yerushalmi; Mishneh Torah, Hil. Tefilah 8:6) that a minyan that begins a davar she'b'kedushah with a quorum can continue even if part of the minyan leaves in the middle, nothing would seem to distinguish the last eight verses from the rest of the Torah.

These authors offer some possible ways in which the last eight verses might then be distinguished, despite that fact that this halakhah applies to the k'riat haTorah in general: a) perhaps a majority need remain to allow continuing (as per the Ran, Megilah ch. 3, and Shulchan Arukh, O.C. 55:2; possibly in disagreement with Sefer HaManhig, (Hil. HaChag, 63). This prompts the question, discussed in some of the above sources, as to what is the reasoning for this halakhah: is it that a minyan retains its status as long as a majority is still present, or is it that a davar sh'b'kedusha must begin with a minyan, but not necessarily end with one (in which case even less than a majority may continue). See Chiddushei R. Akiva Eiger, O.C. 55, and Resp. Teshuvah MeAhavah, 1:31), and here the reading can continue even without a majority of a minyan; b) it is unclear that this halakhah allows the beginning of a new aliyah (see Kesef Mishneh, 8:6; Magen Avraham, 143:1 and Machtzit haShekel; Mishnat Ya'avetzi, ibid; R. Yitzchak Sorotzkin, Gevurot Yitzchak al HaTorah, vol. 2, #317. R. Sorotzkin notes that issue at hand may be whether the end of the Chumash is read on Simchat Torah as a consequence of the annual cycle ending that day, or as an independent obligation reflecting the character of the day); thus, the license to read this section without the minyan remaining may be unusual.

Whatever the scope of application, the view of Maimonides remains that these verses can be read without a minyan. Various explanations are offered for this unique ruling. The Torat Chaim in his commentary to Bava Batra asserts that this is meant to ensure a distinction between Torah (the prophecy of Moses) and Nevuah (as represented by the prophecy of Joshua). R. Moshe Shternbuch suggests that Maimonides was only speaking of a license to read this section with a sefer Torah in the synagogue, but not that one can fulfill the obligation of the Torah reading under those circumstances.

Rav Soloveitchik suggested a different explanation (see R. Mordechai Willig, Beit Yosef Shaul, vol 4 (1994), pp. 163-169, and R. Herschel Schachter, Nefesh HaRav, p. 320-322). He notes that contrary to popular conception, k'riat haTorah, despite requiring a minyan, is actually not a davar she'b'kedushah. (See also Birkhat Kohen al haTorah, #120.) Rather, the need for a minyan comes from a different concern. The contemporary public Torah reading is meant to be evocative of the original receiving of the Torah at Sinai. There, the Torah was given in the presence of the entire Jewish people. Thus, a minyan, representing the entire Jewish community, is necessary for k'riat haTorah.

However, the last eight verses were not transmitted in the same manner as the rest of the Torah, and did not go through the process of Moses repeating the dictation, and commanding the Jewish people with its content. By that process the rest of the Torah was deemed "Torah She'b'khtav" (See also Gevurot Yitzchak al haTorah, ibid, #319). Since these verses were not a part of that, they consequently do not share the requirement of a minyan.

E) The interpretation that has had possibly the greatest impact on actual practice, though, may be that found in the Mordechai (Halakhot K'tanot, 955). In this view, "yachid" should be understood as "singular" or "distinguished", and is thus an exhortation that this aliyah should be given to one who is prominent within the community. This is indeed the practice, as this aliyah is the highly prized "chatan Torah".

However, as noted by R. Tzvi Ashkenazi, the Chacham Tzvi, (Responsa, 13), this interpretation is counterintuitive. According to either understanding in the Talmud, these verses have a status that should render them inferior to any other section of the Torah. Either they were not written by Moses at all, or they were written in a way that caused them to be conveyed differently than the rest of Pentateuch. In either case, to accord this aliyah a status of honor and distinction as a consequence of this nature would be the opposite of what is indicated

R. Meir Dan Plotzki, the Kli Chemdah (Parshat V'Zot HaBerakhah, 3), asserts that Maimonides's view of the lack of a minyan requirement can be

understood as indication of superiority rather than inferiority. The rest of the Torah was spoken by God, then by Moses and transmitted to the Jews. Thus, the Torah that we have is as presented by Moses, rather than directly by God, and a minyan is thus required to evoke the Shechinah. The last eight verses, however, were presented by God without any involvement from Moses as intermediary; thus, this section, transmitted directly by God, is possessed of its own sanctity and no minyan is necessary. (See also Resp. Yad Yitzchak, 1:136.)

Regarding chatan Torah, the Kli Chemdah suggests that the honored status is indeed appropriate and in fact necessary. At this stage, Moses has passed away, and the risk is present that the Jewish people may feel that his influence has ended, as well. Thus, it is crucial that this misconception be challenged. The Torah of Moses continues through his students and the students of his students. Just as Joshua immediately assumed the mantle and the obligation of transmission, so too, Torah scholars in every generation continue to enlighten and guide the Jewish people with the Torah of Moses. It is thus that the aliyah is best given to a leader of the community in the tradition of Moses, to highlight the reality that we are the continued beneficiaries of his teaching and influence.

This year has been one of many losses, losses that are irreplaceable. The pain of this is immense. Yet, at the same time, consolation and inspiration has come from the constant refrain of Am Yisrael Chai, that there is an ongoing legacy that connects us all that endures. The teachings of Moses live on in his students who transmit them and preserve them, passing them on from one generation to the next; and when they reach the end, go right back to the Beginning and start again.

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Vzot Habracha

by Rabbi Berel Wein

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

from: Orthodox Union <alerts@ounetwork.org>

date: Oct 12, 2025, 5:48 PM

subject: Simchat Torah Message 5786

Rabbi Moshe Hauer

21 Tishrei, 5786 Sunday, October 12, 2025

“When Hashem returned the captives of Zion, we were like dreamers. Then our mouths were filled with laughter and our tongues with joyous song” (Tehillim 126:1-2).

Today we hope and pray to experience real joy and express our profound gratitude to G-d. We have incessantly hoped and prayed for the remaining hostages – the living and most of the dead – to return home to the embrace of their families and their people and for the day the heroic soldiers of Tzahal and their families can begin to anticipate a return to normalcy, togetherness, and security.

Yet we are not quite ready to fill our mouths with laughter. Copious tears continue to be shed for those who did not survive and for the unspeakable suffering of those who did, and we remain apprehensive and prayerful regarding the future; the long road of recovery for the affected individuals and families, the prospects of security for Israel and the region as Israel retreats and releases unrepentant terrorists, and the normalization of antisemitism on these shores.

We are no stranger to mixed feelings, as the Psalmist himself notes, “hazorim b’dima b’rina yiktzoru, those who plant with tears, joyfully will harvest.” We have the strength to endure the difficult and tearful periods only because we anticipate the joy to come, while when that joyful end arrives, we are mindful of the painful costs that produced it. We always seem to be living with a blend of tears and joy, b’dima b’rina.

Two years ago, that blend became the lot of the festival of Simchat Torah. That day had previously been celebrated with virtually unbridled joy as the culmination of a month of holidays and a year of Torah study. Now, however, it also marks the yahrzeit (anniversary) of the monstrous carnage inflicted upon our people by Hamas. B’dima b’rina.

Life has become far more complicated. On the scorecard of the battlefield there have been so many losses to mourn even as there have been incredible victories to celebrate. But the transcendent joy of Simchat Torah – of being the nation carrying the Torah – remains as clear as ever. As we have faced the unspeakable evil of some and the moral confusion of others, we are more fiercely committed than ever to be driven, guided, and uplifted by Hashem and His Torah.

Every time we read publicly from the Torah, we perform hagbahah, holding up the holy scroll before the public to show its writing to the people who stand to its right and left, “for it is incumbent upon all men and women to see the written words and bend the knee and say, ‘and this is the Law which Moses set before the children of Israel’” (Masechet Sofrim). On Simchat Torah, in addition to performing an exceptional version of the hagbahah, we dedicate the day to upholding the Torah in our eyes and hearts. We do not for

a moment claim perfection in successfully adhering to its principles, as our recent copious confessions of Yom Kippur humbly acknowledged, but we proudly and firmly affirm our national and individual aspirations to live our lives according to its word at any and all times.

Rabbi Nechunia ben Hakana, one of the sages of the Mishna, would recite a prayer upon leaving the Beit Midrash (house of study) each day, thanking Hashem for giving him the privilege of being amongst those whose place is in the house of study exploring the Torah’s eternal values, rather than being amongst those who make themselves at home in the playhouses of the idle and focus their lives on vain pursuits. We recite that same prayer of thanks whenever we celebrate a siyum completion of a specific volume of the Talmud. We do not and must not take for granted the gift of being part of a nation that upholds the centrality of G-d’s word and His truth as the driving and defining influence in our lives, shaping our morals and actions.

We approach Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah having spent the better part of the past month in our synagogues, realizing on some level the aspiration expressed in our twice-daily seasonal recitation of the 27th Psalm, “there is one thing that I ask of Hashem, it is what I seek; that I may dwell in the house of Hashem all of the days of my life.” As this season draws to a close and we prepare for our return to the world beyond the synagogue walls, we – like Rabbi Nechunia ben Hakana did each day – thank Hashem profusely for the gift G-d granted us to live in His presence for this season, behimatzto, and renew and recenter our pursuit of His word and His truth as the driving and defining influence in our lives. And we thank Him for being part of a nation committed to always trying to do the right thing – even during an existential struggle.

This Simchat Torah, carrying our children on our shoulders and Sifrei Torah in our arms, we will sing and dance in joyous celebration of our Torah, faith, and tradition, and the values that define us. The words – the value statements – that we will sing repeatedly will express our deep appreciation for our good fortune to continue the mission of Klal Yisrael to do good, to be good, to study and live by Hashem’s word, and to bring light and blessing to the world and all who live in it. “Torat Hashem temima meshivas nafesh.

Hashem’s Torah is perfect, restoring the soul. Baruch hu Elokeinu she’bra’anu l’chvodo v’hivdilanu min hato’im. Blessed is our G-d Who created us to bring Him honor, distinguishing us from those who are ethically lost.” We will deepen our appreciation for acheinu kol bait Yisrael, the heroes on the front lines and those whose lives have been upended by the conflict, and we will draw strength from who we are as a nation, from the care that we provide each other, and from living the Torah’s values.

Utzu eitza v’sufar dabru davar v’lo yakum ki imanu Keil. Our enemies may scheme and plan – but G-d is with us.

B’tzpiya l’yeshua krova, with hope for imminent salvation,

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Rabbi Frand on the Weekly Torah Portion

by **Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

V'Zot HaBracha (Deuteronomy 33-34)

Every little Jewish child learns this verse: Torah tzivah lanu Moshe morashah kehillas Yaakov. The Torah Moshe commanded us is an heirloom for the congregation of Yaakov.” Sometimes the word morashah is translated as an inheritance or a heritage, but this is not precise. The exact translation of the word morashah is heirloom.

An heirloom is something we hold precious and dear, something we cherish because it connects us to the treasured past, something we want to pass along to future generations, just as we have received it ourselves from earlier generations.

The Torah is the heirloom of the Jewish people. It is the sublime heirloom, our eternal connection to the Almighty. In the words of the Psalmist (Tehillim 144:15), “Fortunate is the nation that has it so, fortunate is the nation that God is their Lord.”

What is an heirloom to the gentile world? I would like to recount a story I once read about a woman who went on her first deer hunt and shot her first deer. She made laborious preparations for this momentous event. She studied a stack of books about deer hunting, and she learned how to shoot a 30-30 Model 94 Winchester rifle that had been handed down in the family for generations.

So what was her heirloom? A 30-30 Model 94 Winchester rifle. Her great-grandfather passed it on lovingly to her grandfather, and her grandfather gave it to her. On the morning of the hunt, she took the rifle apart and lovingly cleaned and oiled it until it gleamed. And then she went out and shot her first deer. A thrilling moment.

How fortunate are we that the Torah is our heirloom! How fortunate are the Jewish people that God is their Lord!

His Finest Moment The Torah concludes with a stirring eulogy for Moshe, the lawgiver of the Jewish people, "Never again has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moshe, whom God knew face to face; all the signs and wonders that God sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants and all his land; all the strong hands and great awesome deeds Moshe displayed before the eyes of all Israel."

Each of these phrases, as interpreted by Rashi, recalls a specific aspect of Moshe's greatness, leading step by step to the climax of his epitaph: "before the eyes of all Israel," that he had the courage to smash the Luchos, Tablets of the Ten Commandments, in full view of the Jewish people. When all was said and done, this was the ultimate expression of Moshe's greatness, the most superb act he ever performed.

What was so magnificent about this act that it transcended his Torah and all the great miracles he performed?

The Ateres Mordechai offers a profound insight. Before we begin a project, whether it is a book or a building or anything else, we can consider it critically and objectively. But once the project gets underway, we are no longer so objective. And as the project progresses, our objectivity progressively shrinks – until it completely disappears. After we have written our book, we are so invested that we no longer want to entertain any critical thoughts. We don't want to hear that we made a mistake in this or that we shouldn't have written that. We go to extremes to defend against our critics, although we might have made the same arguments ourselves before the fact. And what if we publish a work on the Torah or even a single shtickel Torah, an original Torah homily? We are so proud and pleased with ourselves that we will twist and turn and squirm and contort ourselves every which way to make the unworkable work.

Can we imagine then how Moshe must have felt when he came down the mountain with the Ten Commandments? This was what he had been working toward for years. He had sacrificed for these Tablets. He had spent forty days in Heaven without food or drink fending off the angels and securing the Tablets for the Jewish people. This was his magnum opus, his life's work. Now he comes down the mountain and sees the people worshipping the Golden Calf. He knows instinctively what he must do. He knows that the people are unworthy and that he must smash the Tablets.

And what about all the toil and effort he had invested in them?

He could easily have rationalized to himself, "All right, the people clearly don't deserve the Tablets now, but maybe things will change. What's the point of breaking the Luchos if I might need them again in a day or two? Perhaps I should just put them aside without showing them to the people until they are again deserving. Why ruin a good pair of Tablets?"

But Moshe did not do this. He had absolute integrity. He disregarded all the efforts he had invested in the Tablets. He did not consider that his life's work was going to waste. Truth demanded that he break them, and he did not hesitate to do so.

This was the ultimate virtue the Torah could ascribe to Moshe. The truth, the integrity, the honesty, the clarity of vision uncolored by personal considerations. This was his greatest accomplishment.

I heard a beautiful comment along these lines from Rav Mordechai Gifter. The Talmud tells us (Kiddushin 57a) that Shimon the Amsonite used to develop a secondary meaning from every single occurrence of the Hebrew

particle es in the Torah. For instance, in the commandment of honoring parents there is an es, from which he derived the inclusion of older siblings. One day, he turned his attention to the verse (Devarim 6:13), "Es Hashem Elokecha tira. You shall fear God your Lord." All of a sudden, he said, "This cannot be. There is no secondary recipient of the fear we must feel for Hashem." Therefore, he recanted on all his original derivations, thousand and thousands of insights, because his rule could not be applied consistently to the entire Torah.

And then Rabbi Akiva came along and taught that even in this there could be secondary recipients – Torah scholars! They are worthy of sharing the reverence for the Divine.

Wonderful.

But why, asks Rav Gifter, couldn't Shimon the Amsonite think of this solution? Why was this specialist on the es particle stumped while Rabbi Akiva was able to figure it out?

The answer, says Rav Gifter, is that Rabbi Akiva saw the way Shimon the Amsonite dealt with this problem. He saw the tremendous devotion to truth, the inviolable intellectual integrity, the willingness to forfeit many years of effort and creativity if there was a problem with the reasoning. When Rabbi Akiva saw that a Torah scholar could reach such a level of integrity and honesty in defense of the truth of Torah, he realized that Torah scholars too can share in the reverence for the Divine. They can be included in "Es Hashem Elokecha tira."

Customarily, a glass is broken at a Jewish wedding. What is the reason for this custom? The reason most commonly given is to recall the destruction of Yerushalayim during times of rejoicing. One commentator connects this custom to the breaking of the Tablets of the Commandments. Why do we need to be reminded of this event during a wedding?

Perhaps it is because the breaking of the Tablets was such an act of profound honesty and integrity on the part of Moshe. In order for a marriage to work, there is also a need for extraordinary honesty and integrity on the part of both husband and wife. In case of discussion or disagreement, both have to speak and act with absolute honesty and integrity, to be straight and aboveboard, to do what is right rather than what is comfortable and convenient. Both have to be ready to admit their mistakes rather than stand on their pride. Both need to be prepared to let go of their preconceived notions and prejudices and work toward the common good. Both have to be willing to face the truth.

These are not easy demands, but if husband and wife want to gain the most happiness possible from their marriage, they have to find the strength of character in themselves to do these things. The reminder of the breaking of the Tablets is meant to give them courage. If Moshe was ready to break them and let go of all his hopes and dreams for the sake of truth, these two people can find a way to build their marriage on a foundation of truth.

----- from: Ben Olam Haba

<ben@halachafortoday.com>

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Halachos for Monday, Hoshana Rabba

1) After davening on Hoshana Rabba, after using the Lulav and Esrog for the last time, many have the custom to place the Lulav (with the Hadasim and Aravos still bound to it) on top of the door, on top of the Aron Kodesh, or in another safe place and save it for Erev Pesach when it can be burned together with the Chametz.

The purpose of doing this is to use something that was used for a Mitzvah (the Lulav) in conjunction with yet another Mitzvah (burning the Chametz) (See Kaf HaChaim Siman 664:60. Based on a Talmud Yerushalmi Eiruvin Perek 6:7, quoted in Tur Siman 297:4. See also Orchos Rabbeinu from the Steipler Zatzal Vol. 2 Page 316)

2) Some have the custom to make a jelly/jam out of the Esrogim that were used for a Mitzvah. This jelly/jam is given to pregnant women to eat while they are in labor, as eating this Mitzvah jelly/jam is a Segulah for an easy birth and for the child to be healthy.

Many people also have the custom to taste this Esrog jelly/jam on the eve of Tu B'Shvat. (See Kaf HaChaim ibid. and Orchos Rabbeinu ibid.)

[It is proper to pray on the eve of Tu B'Shvat that one merit having a nice Esrog on the next Sukkos. See Bnei Yissoscher Chodesh Sh'vat Ma'amar 2. See also Sefer Lashon Chachamim Vol. 1 Siman 38]

It is a Segulah for pregnant women to bite off the Pitum of the Esrog on Hoshana Rabbah, and to give Tzedakah and daven for an easy labor. (See Likutei Mahariach Sukkos page 106a. See also Elef Hamagen Siman 660:6 and Sefer Moed L'Kol Chai Siman 24:25 where a special Tefilah text is printed for the woman to say)

Halachos for Tuesday, Shmini Atzeres (Simchas Torah in Eretz Yisroel)

1) When dancing with the Torah on Simchas Torah, it is a mitzvah to rejoice as best as one can; this Simcha should be L'Shem Shomayim, in honor of Hashem and His holy Torah, and not simply an unstructured "party" or "good time" and surely one must be careful to avoid any levity or lightheadedness (S'Chok V'kalus Rosh) (See Tur and Rama Siman 669. See also Ben Ish Chai Parshas V'Zos HaBracha, year one, Siman 18 and Kaf HaChaim Siman 669:23. See also Mishna Berura Siman 669:11 and Rambam Hilchos Lulav Perek 8:15)

2) M'Ikar HaDin (according to the letter of the law) one must stand the entire time that the Sifrei Torah are out for the hakafos, in respect of the Torah. (Rav Bentzion Abba Shaul Zatzal was extremely stringent with this and didn't sit down the entire Hakafos and ruled this way for all who were with him that were healthy and able bodied)

However, if it is difficult for one to stand, the Poskim are lenient and allow sitting down, besides for the first time around the Bimah of each hakafa when everyone must stand. (See Halichos Shlomo Perek 12:9 for the reasoning behind this leniency)

Some have the custom to only sit while holding a Sefer Torah in their hands. (This was the minhag of the Steipler and Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv Zichronam L'vracha)

Halachos for Wednesday, Simchas Torah (Isru Chag in Eretz Yisroel)

1) Shmini Atzeres/Simchas Torah is an extremely opportune time, an Eis Ratzon, for one's Tefillos to be accepted by HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Therefore it is proper to daven with extreme Kavanah. (See Sefer Moed L'Kol Chai Siman 25:1. This is based on a Zohar HaKadosh Parshas Noach and Parshas Tzav where it basically says that all that one asks for (in earnest) will be given to them! See also Sefer Seder HaYom Seder Simchas Torah Dibur Hamaschil U'Bsefer HaZohar)

2) It is customary to bid on and try to purchase the Aliyos known as "Choson Torah" (The aliyah where the Torah is "finished") and "Choson Bereishis" (The Aliyah where the Torah is once again begun) for large amounts of money, which goes to support Talmidei Chachamim or the needs of the Shul where people daven and learn.

If possible, it is best to try and have these Aliyos go to Talmidei Chachamim or at least to respected people in the Tzibbur. (See Mishna Berura Siman 669:1)

The custom is for those who received the two aforementioned aliyos to make a Kiddush (on an upcoming Shabbos over the next few weeks) to celebrate their receiving these exalted Aliyos, as they are a celebration of the completion [and re-starting] of Torah. (Tur Siman 669. See also Beis Yosef there and Kaf HaChaim 669:24 and Rama Yoreh Deah Siman 246:26)

<https://www.yutorah.org/sidebar/lecturedata/1150223/Thoughts-for-Simchat-Torah:-Divine-Fire-and-National-Legacy>

Simchat Torah: Divine Fire and National Legacy

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Simchat Torah celebrates the role of Torah in the history of Am Yisrael. This chag is not mandated by the Torah itself, but developed through Jewish minhag over time. The practice of completing the Torah reading cycle on the second day of Shemini Atzeret, as observed in the Diaspora, dates back at least two thousand years to the Talmudic era. Because this day marked the

conclusion of the Torah, it became a celebration in its own right. The earliest records of a distinct celebration of Simchat Torah appear about a thousand years ago. Jewish minhag elevated the second day of Shemini Atzeret into a separate chag, with its own theme and spirit.

The final section of the Torah, read on Simchat Torah, describes Moshe Rabeinu's death. As Moshe prepares to depart, he turns to his people and delivers blessings. In this moment, he echoes Yaakov Avinu, who had gathered his children to bless them before passing away. After forty tumultuous years of leading the people through the desert, with its highs of triumph and lows of failure, Moshe brings his leadership to a close with a heartfelt blessing for the nation he guided.

As he begins his blessings, Moshe Rabeinu evokes the revelation at Har Sinai, recalling the moment when the Torah was given. The dual imagery of Torah as both heavenly fire and national inheritance is foundational to our understanding of its role in history and in our lives.

Torah as Fire and Heritage In his blessings, Moshe Rabeinu presents two complementary images of Torah. First, he portrays it as descending with divine fire: "Mi-yemino esh dat lamo" – "From His right hand, a fiery law for them" (Devarim 33:2). This evokes a Torah that is heavenly, absolute, and holy, untouched by human weakness or history. The divine fire signals that it is the word of Hashem, eternal and pure, unaffected by human choices or historical circumstance. Yet in the very next phrase, Moshe Rabeinu frames the Torah as the inheritance of Am Yisrael: "Torah tziva lanu Moshe, morasha kehillet Ya'akov" – "Moshe commanded us the Torah, an inheritance for the people of Jacob" (Devarim 33:4). Here Torah is not distant fire but a living, national heritage, carried and shaped through Jewish history and observance. Before delivering blessings to the various sectors of the people, Moshe presents Torah as both heaven's fire and the lived story of the Jewish nation.

Throughout history, Torah has at times stood as a divine, untouchable document, and at other times woven into the currents of Jewish experience, carried and shaped by the people of Israel. Its dual nature—both divine and national—has been reflected in every generation's approach to learning, observance, and communal life.

Torah Woven Into Society During the thirteen-hundred-year golden age of Jewish sovereignty, Torah was deeply woven into the fabric of society. Am Yisrael lived under a theocracy, and Torah law guided judicial decisions, social practice, and governance. Many mitzvot are communal in nature, requiring a sovereign Jewish polity rooted in the Land of Israel. In this context, Torah and daily life were inseparable: commandments were enacted, values were lived, and Torah's authority was reinforced by the structure of the state. In this era, Torah and Jewish history moved in harmony: the land, sovereignty, and Torah scholarship flourished together.

Torah Independent of History About two thousand years ago, Torah underwent a profound shift. Am Yisrael was expelled from Eretz Yisrael. We lost monarchy, sovereignty, land, and much of our societal framework. The anchors that tied Torah to lived Jewish experience were gone. Yet Torah study and halachic observance endured. At this point, Torah became a largely self-sufficient world of Jewish experience, able to exist independently of political sovereignty. As the gemara states: – "From the day the Beit HaMikdash was destroyed, Hashem had only the four cubits of Torah study and halacha upon which to rely" (Berachot 8a). This teaching underscores Torah's capacity to flourish even when severed from the broader cultural and national framework. At this juncture, Torah came to resemble divine fire—elevated, independent, and largely untouched, standing apart from historical circumstance.

Independent and Unquenchable Not only has Torah at times existed apart from Jewish experience, it has also operated autonomously from general history. Attempts were made throughout the ages to suppress Torah, yet each effort ultimately failed. Indeed, efforts to quench Torah often resulted in its greater expansion.

The Greeks sought to eliminate Torah study, yet their defeat sparked one of the greatest Torah supernovas in history: the emergence of the Tana'im, who articulated the teachings of the Oral Torah, ultimately codified in the

Mishnah in the third century CE. A few hundred years after Chanukah, the Romans issued harsh decrees against Torah study and ordination of rabbis, yet these efforts provoked Torah to grow. In the immediate aftermath, the Amora'im emerged to codify the Talmudic discussions, not merely the concise statements of the Mishnah. Torah existed apart from human history, and attempts to quench its fire only fanned its expansion.

At the end of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Crusades devastated Jewish communities in the Rhineland, terrorizing cities and murdering scholars. Yet in the two centuries that followed, France became a flourishing center of Torah study. The academies of the Tosafot articulated a methodology for Talmudic analysis that would guide generations. Similarly, persecution in Central Europe from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries did not halt Torah's growth. Torah continued to burn as divine fire, thriving precisely when history sought to extinguish it. At different points in history, Torah has been intertwined with the heritage of Am Yisrael, coupled with other elements of communal inheritance. At other times, it has stood apart as a divine fire, untouched by human hands—Jewish or otherwise.

Divided Visions of Torah Now that we have returned to Eretz Yisrael, the question has resurfaced: should Torah exist apart from society, or be fully integrated within it? In the era of the Beit HaMikdash, every Jew was observant, and all were committed to Torah. Torah was naturally woven into the fabric of a sovereign society and state. In that historical context, alignment between Torah and social structure was evident.

Today, living in a sovereign state that is not formally religious, this question has new urgency. Many feel Torah should once again be the inheritance of all Israel, fully integrated into society. This vision shapes everything from army service to efforts to expand Torah study among Jews who are not fully observant. It also encompasses broader initiatives to infuse Torah life into every sector of Israeli society, even those with no intention of becoming religious.

This perspective views Torah as the inheritance of Am Yisrael as a whole, shaping national identity and moral responsibility.

A different approach emphasizes Torah as heavenly fire. Until broader society fully embraces Torah observance, Torah must remain on a separate track, protected and autonomous. Not only must it remain autonomous of broader social pressures, it also serves as a protest and shield against cultural forces. Torah, in this view, is a hedge safeguarding the Jewish soul, preserving its spiritual integrity in the face of secularizing influences. In modern Israel, visions of Torah diverge sharply. Some see it fully integrated into society, while others insist it remain independent and protected. Some experience it as divine, heavenly fire, while others see it as a shared national heritage for all Jews to engage with at different levels.

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Vezot Haberachah

Adapted by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks; From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

On Simchat Torah, the day of Rejoicing with the Torah, we complete our yearly reading of the Torah and begin the cycle again. What is the connection between the day itself and the Sidra we read on it, Vezot Haberachah? And why do we celebrate the Torah on this day instead of on Shavuot when it was first given? In the Sicha that follows, one point must be made clear to avoid confusion. Shemini Atzeret—the eighth day of Succot and a festival in its own right—and Simchat Torah, the day following, were originally a single festival. Outside the land of Israel, however, where we celebrate two festive days instead of one, they are separated. But they are in essence a single religious event, and they are treated as such in the Sicha.

1. Shemini Atzeret—the Day and the Reading

Basing himself on the Talmud,¹ Rambam writes² that on every festival we read a passage from the Torah relating to that day, for “Moses instituted for Israel that they read on every festival its appropriate section.” He continues by specifying the readings for the individual festivals, and says, “On the last day (of Succot) we read the section beginning Kol Habechor, ‘All the firstling males...,’ and on the next day we read the Sidra Vezot Haberachah, ‘And this is the blessing....’”

Thus the reason that we read Vezot Haberachah on the second day of Shemini Atzeret is not merely, as has been suggested, to end the cycle of the year's festivals with Moses' concluding blessing to Israel.³ Nor is it to couple the celebration of the festival with that of completing the annual reading of the Torah.⁴ Nor again is it to join Moses' blessing with the blessing that Solomon pronounced over the people on Shemini Atzeret.⁵ These are all reasons, but they are incidental. The main one is, as Rambam implies, that the Sidra of Vezot Haberachah directly concerns the festival itself.

But what is the connection between them?

2. The Unique Nation

In the Talmud⁶ we find an explanation of the symbolism of the sacrifices made on Succot and Shemini Atzeret. “To what do the seventy bullocks (that were offered during Succot) correspond? To the seventy nations. To what does the single bullock (of Shemini Atzeret) correspond? To the single (i.e., unique) nation (Israel).”

Shemini Atzeret is therefore the day when Israel's uniqueness is revealed. This is its connection with Vezot Haberachah. For Moses begins his blessing with the words, “The L-rd came from Sinai, and rose from Seir unto them; He shined forth from Mt. Paran.” Rashi explains the reference to Seir and Paran in this way: “He first addresses Himself to the sons of Esau (the inhabitants of Seir) that they should accept the Torah, but they refused. Then He went and addressed Himself to the sons of Ishmael (who lived in Paran) that they should accept it, and they too refused.” The descendants of Esau and Ishmael here stand for the whole non-Jewish world, and the meaning of Moses' words is therefore that the whole world⁷ had the opportunity of accepting G-d's law at the time of Sinai, but only Israel, “the unique nation”—took it upon themselves.⁸

Yet, although this emphasis of Israel's uniqueness links Vezot Haberachah with Shemini Atzeret, it surely connects it more strongly with another festival, Shavuot, the “season of the Giving of our Torah.” For Moses was referring to the events which surrounded Mt. Sinai, and these took place on Shavuot.

3. The Breaking of the Tablets

The explanation lies in the last words of the Sidra, with which the Five Books of Moses close: “There has not since risen a prophet in Israel like Moses... in all the mighty hand, and in all the great terror, which Moses wrought in the sight of all Israel.”

Rashi is prompted by the question, what precisely was the act referring to in the phrase “which Moses wrought in the sight of all Israel?” He says it was the moment when “his heart inspired him to shatter the tablets (of the Ten Commandments) before their eyes.”

But why should this act have been counted amongst Moses' virtues? It was, on the face of it, connected with an episode of Divine displeasure. Indeed Rashi writes elsewhere⁹ that “the death of the righteous is as grievous before the Holy One blessed be He as the day on which the tablets were broken.” Rashi himself answers this question, by saying that when Moses broke the tablets, “the Holy One blessed be He agreed with Moses' opinion” and congratulated him.

But this does not solve our difficulty. The Talmud¹⁰ tells us what was Moses' reasoning. He argued, a fortiori, “If, about the Passover sacrifice, which is only one of the 613 precepts, the Torah says,¹¹ ‘no alien shall eat thereof,’ here is the whole Torah, and the Israelites are apostates—how much more so.” In other words, Moses was defending the honor of the Torah in not wanting to transmit it to “apostates,” but he was, at the same time, stressing the unworthiness of Israel. How then can Vezot Haberachah—Moses'

blessing to Israel—end with their dispraise? Indeed, the Sidra’s ending would contradict its beginning, for it opens by stating Israel’s uniqueness in accepting the Torah, and ends by suggesting their unworthiness to do so. It is stranger still that the final words of the Torah, whose whole purpose was to be addressed to and accepted by Israel, should concern the shattering of the tablets on which its laws were inscribed.

4. The Second Tablets and the Path of Return

We are forced instead to say that G-d congratulated Moses for the breaking of the tablets, because his act was in honor not only of the Torah but also of Israel.

Here we must remember that G-d did not congratulate Moses immediately. He waited until forty days had passed, until He gave the command, “Hew thee two tablets of stone like the first which you broke.”¹² And Rashi does not give his interpretation that G-d’s words were a congratulation until Vezot Haberachah, on Moses’ death, forty years later. This in itself suggests that the full virtue of Moses’ act was not apparent until the end of his life.

The explanation is this. The Talmud¹³ tells us that “the Israelites only made the golden calf to place a good argument in the mouth of those who return and repent.” G-d allowed the Israelites to be tempted into making the calf only for the sake of their ultimate repentance, which was an unprecedented type of repentance: One which would bring them to an even higher level of spirituality than they had achieved before the sin.¹⁴

Thus the breaking of the first tablets because of the sin of the golden calf prepared the way for the second tablets which were greater than the first¹⁵—the perennial reminder of the power of repentance not merely to efface the sins of the past, but to bring man to new spiritual heights.

This, too, was Moses’ ultimate intention in refusing to give the Torah to “apostates.” He did not wish simply to defend the Torah’s honor, but rather to awaken in Israel a desire to return to G-d. He was like a father who drives his errant son from his house, not to cast him off, but to create a longing to return.¹⁶ This is why Moses broke the tablets “in the sight of all Israel.”¹⁷ He was making a public gesture, directed towards the Israelites; something they would witness and by it be changed for good.

This is why the fast of the 17th of Tammuz, the day when the tablets were broken,¹⁸ will be transformed in the Time to Come into a day of gladness and rejoicing.¹⁹ At the present we see only the immediate consequences of the golden calf, the sufferings of exile, several of whose major tragedies also occurred on the 17th of Tammuz. Therefore we fast. But when Israel’s return to G-d is complete, it will be seen to have begun on the day when the tablets were shattered, and it will be a day of rejoicing.

But only when the second tablets had been commanded—the sign of the power of repentance—did G-d congratulate Moses. And this congratulation was not made explicit until the end of Moses’ life, when he was granted a vision of the “final day” and saw “all that would happen to Israel in the future until the resurrection of the dead.”²⁰ For it was then that he saw the final triumph of repentance, the Messianic fulfillment of what he had begun at Sinai.

5. The Rejoicing with the Torah

This, then, is the connection between Vezot Haberachah and Shemini Atzeret.

On the face of it, we should celebrate Simchat Torah Rejoicing with the Torah, on Shavuot when the Ten Commandments were first given. But our greatest rejoicing belongs to the second tablets, which were given on Yom Kippur. And Shemini Atzeret is the end of the festive cycle which begins with Yom Kippur.²¹

However, we must also remember that the opening words of Moses’ blessing, “The L-rd came from Sinai...” refer to the first occasion of the Giving of the Torah, so that this too must have relevance to Simchat Torah.

6. The Righteous and the Repentant

The difference between the first tablets and the second is like that between the righteous and the repentant. When the first were given, Israel was still righteous; by the time of the second, they had sinned and repented.

The righteous are men whose virtue consists of the fact that they live according to the Torah. But repentance reaches even higher than Torah.²² It

rests on the bond between G-d and man which survives even when man transgresses G-d’s law. Thus at the time of the first tablets, Israel received a revelation from the Torah. But at the time of the second, they themselves gave revelation to the Torah. They had reached beyond it, to the essential union between G-d and Israel.

This is the relation of Vezot Haberachah to Simchat Torah: The Sidra begins with the first tablets, when Israel rejoiced in the Torah. And it ends with the second tablets, when the Torah itself rejoiced in Israel. Similarly, Simchat Torah means “rejoicing with the Torah,” and also means “rejoicing of the Torah.”²³

7. The Day and the Year

The Festivals were not instituted as self-contained events, days of light and joy. Our task is to bring what we feel on these days to the whole of the year. They form a sanctuary in time, whose light is to spread to every corner of the calendar.

But when confronted with this mission, the Jew may feel intimidated by its enormity. How can the secular world, from which G-d is so heavily hidden, be made receptive to its opposite, the light of holiness?

Here the Sidra gives us the precedent and the strength. For even that seeming calamity, the breaking of the tablets, was potentially the beginning of the path of return to G-d, the opening of a new and higher access to the heights of the spirit. This is why, as soon as we have read the phrase about the tablets, “in the sight of all Israel,” we begin again with the Torah’s opening words, “In the beginning, G-d created....” For by the G-dly powers within him, the powers he discovers by returning to G-d, the Jew can stand in the darkest confines of a secular order and create a new world. He can be architect and builder of a world in which “every creature knows its Creator, and where every dominion recognizes the sovereignty of G-d.”²⁴

(Source: Likkutei Sichot, Vol. IX pp. 237-243)

FOOTNOTES 1. Megillah, 31a. 2. Hilchot Tefillah, 13:8. 3. Ran, Talmud, Megillah, Ibid. 4. Machzor Vitri, 385. 5. Ibid.; Avudraham. 6. Sukkah, 55b. 7. Avodah Zarah, 2b. 8. Cf. Likkutei Sichot, Vol. IV, p. 1309. 9. Devarim 10:7. 10. Shabbat, 87a, quoted in Rashi, Shemot 32:19. 11. Shemot 12:43. 12. Ibid. 13. Devarim 10:2. 14. Avodah Zarah, 4b. Rashi, ad loc. 15. Cf. Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah, 7:4. 16. Shemot Rabbah, ch. 46. 17. Cf. Or Hatorah, Vaera, p. 123. 18. Cf. Devarim 9:17. 19. Mishnah, Taanit, 26a. 20. Zechariah 8:19. 21. Sifri and Rashi, Devarim 34:2. 22. Or Hatorah, Shemini Atzeret, p. 1779 ff. 23. Cf. Likkutei Torah, Acharei, 26c; Derech Mitzvotcha, Mitzvat Vidui Uteshuvah. 24. Sefer Hamaamarim 5699, pp. 68 and 72. Cf. Zohar, Part III, 256b. 25. Rosh Hashanah prayer.

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By Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

פרשת זאת הברכה תשפ"ו

Vzot Haberachah

לא היתה עינו ולא נס לחה His eyes had not dimmed, and his vigor had not been diminished. (34:7)

Moshe Rabbeinu was the consummate ish Elokim, a human being who possessed human qualities -- character, empathy, compassion, etc.-- yet was a man of G-d who was bound up totally in the Heavenly sphere. As such, despite being “housed” in a human form, Moshe’s neshamah was his ikar, primary essence and identity. This, explains Horav Dovid Povarsky, zl, is why his makom kevarah, burial site, could not be located. As a neshamah, spiritual entity, burial in a specific place was not a reality. His “burial” was of a spiritual nature. [Concepts that deal with spirituality are difficult to comprehend with the limitations of a mortal mind and perspective.]

On the other hand, Moshe’s humanness was evident in his manner of leadership. Thus, he served as a model for all future leaders to (attempt to) emulate. In describing Moshe’s transcending the physical aging process and its effect on the human body, the Torah selects two qualities that did not affect Moshe: Lo kohasah eino, v’lo nass leicho, “His eye had not dimmed, and his vigor had not diminished.” He remained fresh physically. The aging

process, which affects all human beings, had no effect on him. One would expect the Torah's description of Moshe's ability to avoid the frailty of aging to be more along the lines of his leadership qualities, his ability to run and guide the nation as if he were a young man. When we describe the qualities of a ninety-year old CEO who is still putting in a full day, we address his acuity and physical stamina – not his eyesight and vigor.

Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, explains it happens more often than we care to admit that, when one ascends to the position of leadership, he turns away his eyes (he ignores) from the ignominious behavior of his close friends and (even) family. He “swallows” reports of impropriety attributed to members of his inner circle. Moshe neither turned a “dim eye” to anything that had occurred to anyone close to him, nor tolerated questionable behavior.

Moshe Rabbeinu, the greatest leader Klal Yisrael has ever known, embodied the perfect blend of compassion coupled with unyielding truth. He loved Klal Yisrael and viewed their challenges and problems as his own, bearing their burdens with his signature humility. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that his humility was not born of weakness; his patience was not the result of passivity. He was a leader who cowered before no one. He did not gloss over faults, and he confronted evil head on – not out of anger, but out of a sense of justice.

Moshe did not confuse love with approval (as many of us do as parents). He did not brook compromise, excuses, or mediocrity. He held Klal Yisrael to a higher standard, because they were the Am Hashem. He set the model for leadership. He sought truth – not popularity; he demanded pride – not obsequiousness; he expected excellence -- not adequacy. This is the legacy that he bequeathed to us.

ולכל היד החזקה ולכל המורא הגדול אשר עשה משה לעיני כל ישראל

And by all the strong hand and awesome power that Moshe performed before the eyes of all Yisrael. (34:12) Rashi teaches that the yad ha'chazakah, strong hand, refers to Moshe Rabbeinu having received the Luchos from Hashem in his hands. “Before the eyes of all Yisrael” refers to his decision to shatter the Luchos before the nation, in response to their sin with the Golden Calf. Hashem's response was: Yiyasher kochacha asher shibarta. Not only did Hashem thank Moshe Rabbeinu for shattering the Luchos; it became his epitaph. His ability to make a decisive -- almost inexplicable -- decision to break the Luchos demonstrated his leadership capabilities. Maintaining, preserving, building are marks of a great leader. Tearing down, breaking, and destroying, because the time is not right and could ultimately affect the future trajectory demands an uber leader: Moshe Rabbeinu. That is the simple p'shat, explanation. The commentators, each in his own manner, explain why it was important to shatter the Luchos.

Perhaps we can offer an alternative approach. We view breaking as destruction and, for the most part, it is. At times, however, breaking is the beginning of the healing process. Thus, shattering something precious becomes the segue for something deeper and truer. The well-known aphorism of the Kotzker Rebbe, zl, “There is nothing so whole as a broken heart,” comes into play. Klal Yisrael were in a spiritually challenged predicament when Moshe descended the mountain. To put it in simple terms: They had sinned egregiously. Bowing to the molten calf, followed by reveling, dancing and immoral behavior, meshed together to create a sin of monumental iniquity. These people were sadly farremoved from accepting the Torah. Moshe understood that their relationship with “whole” Luchos would never be the same. They had gone too far, but, perhaps, they would return through remorse and sincere teshuvah. When Moshe broke the Luchos, he was actually preserving the Torah. The nation would feel the hurt and humiliation of what they had done wrong. When they, too, would feel broken, they could hope to become whole again.

The second Luchos were the product of that brokenness – of remorse, teshuvah, hope and faith. The second Luchos brought with them the Torah She'Baal'Peh, the Oral Law, which has preserved our commitment and was the springboard for a more enduring relationship with Hashem. The breaking of the Luchos was not an act of despair. Moshe had not given up on Klal Yisrael. He saw that they needed an awakening, an act of seismic proportion,

a thunderclap of emotion that would shock the souls of his nascent People. The breaking of the Luchos was an act of deep faith in us. It was a profound statement that, even in failure, we can hope. We are not discarded. Yes, from our brokenness of heart, we can once again become whole – with Hashem and with ourselves. The brokenness brought out the best in us.

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