



הַמִּזְרָחִי HAMIZRACHI PARSHA WEEKLY

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**כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה
וּדְבַר ה' מִירוּשָׁלַיִם**

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Based in Jerusalem and with branches across the globe, Mizrachi – an acronym for *merkaz ruchani* (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez. Mizrachi's role was then and remains with vigor today, to be a proactive partner and to take personal responsibility in contributing to the collective destiny of *Klal Yisrael* through a commitment to Torah, the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.

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What is a Jewish Inheritance?

A spiritual share in Torah and Eretz Yisrael



Rabbi Doron Perez
Executive Chairman, World Mizrachi

There are only two things in the entire Torah, which are called a מורשה – an inheritance for the Jewish people. Something that every Jew has a spiritual stake in and owns a part of – the Torah and the land of Israel. These two central, overarching Jewish values alone are seen as possessions of the Jewish people as a whole.

The Torah

In this week's *parsha*, VeZot HaBracha, the final one of the year, the *pasuk* famously states:

“תּוֹרָה צְוֶה-לָנוּ מֹשֶׁה מוֹרְשָׁה קְהֵלֶת יִעֲקֹב”

“Moshe commanded us with the Teaching as the Torah, an **inheritance** for the congregation of Jacob.” (Devarim 33:4)

The Torah that Hashem commanded us at Sinai is indeed a spiritual inheritance for the communities of Israel. Just as the soul is to the body, so is the Torah to the collective national body – our core sacred spiritual and moral heart.

The Land of Israel

Regarding the land of Israel, the *pasuk* clearly states:

“וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת-יְדֵי... וְנָתַתִּי אֹתָהּ לְכֶם מוֹרְשָׁה אֲנִי ה'”

I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for an **inheritance**, I and Hashem.” (Shemot 6:8)

When Hashem promised Moshe Rabbeinu, in the beginning of Parshat Vaaira, that He would fulfill his promise to take the Jewish people out of Egypt and end their servitude, He famously promises this with the four expressions of Redemption, which have become the mainstay of the Pesach

Haggadah, and a salient reasons we drink the four cups of wine.

The *pesukim* famously state (Shemot 6:6-8):

“וְהוֹצֵאתִי... וְהַצַּלְתִּי... וְגֵאלְתִּי... וְלִקַּחְתִּי...”

“I will bring you out... I will save you ... I will redeem you ... I will take you...”

The verse continues with a fifth promise and expression of *Geula*, our verse above of how G-d will bring us out of the land that He has promised to give to our forefathers, as an eternal inheritance.

Our Unique Personal Portion

In short, only the Torah and the land of Israel are the values which every Jew across all generations has a part in, and so to speak, owns a portion of. It is for this reason that only regarding the Torah and *Eretz Yisrael* do our sages say in, that each person has their own unique חלק – personal part and share.

Regarding the Torah, our Sages have instituted both in the daily prayers and the Shabbat and Yom Tov *davening* the following striking prayer – ותן חלקנו בתורתך – that Hashem should grant us our unique part in the Torah.¹

So too regarding the land of Israel does the Torah specifically say regarding the the division of the land of Israel amongst all of Israel – ‘לאלה תחלק הארץ בנחלה’ – To these shall the land be divided as personal estate...’ (Bamidbar 26:53). The word חלק – a personal share – is used. Rabbi Shimshon Refael Hirsch comments² as follows: “Turns out that every tribe and every family in that tribe and every individual in that family should receive its appropriate land inheritance... This fulfills the unique nature of the Jewish people...every tribe, branch and household with its own uniqueness and

with this uniqueness finds its appropriate place to develop on the land ...”

Only regarding Torah and the land do we have this unique part, portion and inheritance.

Morasha vs. Yerusha

Why is the unusual word for inheritance מורשה used and not the more common word ירושה?

We are all familiar with this word both in Hebrew and Yiddish – a ירושה or *yerusha* means an inheritance. When we inherit something from our parents, it is known as a ירושה and not a מורשה.

Furthermore, the Mishna in Avot (2:12) specifically says “Prepare yourself for learning Torah as it is **not** a ירושה – an inheritance for you,” whereas the Torah specifically promises that it **is** a מורשה – an inheritance – for you. Is the Torah or is it not an inheritance? Why the contradiction – that it is a מורשה but not a ירושה? What is the meaning of this unusual and uncommon word מורשה and how is it specifically related to Torah and the land of Israel?

The answer is that מורשה implies something proactive, as opposed to ירושה, which is passive. A person needs to do absolutely nothing in order to receive a hefty ירושה. One simply receives something as a gift from the previous generation. Parents simply leave it for their children who don’t do, but receive it, and who may not even deserve it. The children who inherit this have no responsibility to forward this to the next generation but can do as this please. They can just receive it, use it and even squander it if they so choose. Often – easy come, easy go.

This is entirely different from the term מורשה. A מורשה is something that one is proactively given to one and something which one needs to proactively hand over to the next generation. The verb ירש is used here in the הפעיל proactive format which means **to cause to inherit** – מוריש. In other words, others actively cause us to inherit it, and we are charged with the responsibility to labor to own it and then to cause others to inherit it. We have an intergenerational responsibility to receive that which our parents have proactively given to us, and one which we are equally responsible to hand to the next generation.

The following critical double-edged blessing emerges. While we are promised that the Torah and *Eretz Yisrael* are eternal and unique inheritances for the Jewish people – this is only true for the Jewish people

collectively. Individually however, **who** will merit this will depend on how much the person invests in this inheritance. It is not a foregone conclusion at all.³

Today’s Twin Scourges – Assimilation and Anti-Israel

It seems that the two great challenges facing the Jewish people today and indeed throughout history are specifically around these two core values – Torah and the land of Israel. Put differently in today’s terminology, assimilation and anti-Zionism.

Very often, when the Jewish people have been successful in integrating into the dominant society, they have faced the great challenge of assimilation. From the time of Chanukah – of Greek Hellenistic cultural influence – and sporadically across history, many have been lost from Jewish continuity along the way. Today’s crescendo with assimilation rates, between 50% and 80% in many communities around the world, have created unparalleled challenges. Although Jewish continuity has been biblically promised and miraculously guaranteed, who will be part of this legacy has not. In many ways, this depends on us.

Wherever the connection to Torah values is weak, intermarriage and assimilation follows. The Jewish people without Torah values are like a body without a soul, and hence cannot sustain itself over time. Receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai, celebrated annually on Shavuot and completing the annual public weekly Torah reading on Simchat Torah, are tangible collective acknowledgments of the extricable link between Torah and the fate of the Jewish people. Revelation at Sinai is inherently linked to redemption from Egypt and Jewish values and destiny are indivisible from Jewish fate and continuity.

As the Zionist movement achieved its aim of Jewish statehood, which continues to be built every day, there appeared a challenge to the second מורשה – our share and ownership of the land of Israel.

Many forces globally continually attack and demonize Israel, and incredibly, deny the Jewish people any portion in the land of Israel. There is no other people on earth, who has a longer and deeper collective attachment to a tract of land, than the Jewish people’s connection to *Eretz Yisrael*. It is the only land that they have ever been a sovereign in and built a Jewish state. Their exile was forcibly imposed upon them, and they never gave up the dream of restoration

and return, which has miraculously been realized in our generation of the ingathering of the exiles. Yet despite this undeniable evidence, there are those who deny that the Jewish people has any claim of collective ownership to any part of this land. This is today’s diabolical blood libel and incarnation of anti-Semitism.

Our Mission Today

Our great Jewish mission today, to ensure the indivisible connection between Judaism and Jewish peoplehood; and between Jewish destiny and the centrality of the land of Israel. Both Torah and *Eretz Yisrael* remain the eternal collective inheritance passed from one generation to the next – pivotal to Jewish identity and destiny.

This requires courage, commitment and pro-activity. It is something which others מוריש – actively give to us, and more importantly, something which we have to labor to merit and then to hand over to the next generation. This on an individual level can never be taken for granted. Many have not managed to hand over their Jewish tradition to the next generation – neither their connection to Judaism nor their love of the land of Israel. The forces of assimilation and anti-Zionism are incredibly powerful and potent, receiving great impetus from the postmodern cultural milieu of the times adversely affecting many who are distant from authentic Jewish values.

As we complete the Torah reading on Simchat Torah with VeZot HaBracha and celebrate our ongoing collective connection to the Torah, may we all be inspired to commit with courage to do all we can to internalize and bequeath the beauty of over dual inheritance and heritage to the generations to come.

1. This appears three times a day at the conclusion of every silent prayer in the יהי רצון after we have taken our three steps back and forward. During every Shabbat and Yom Tov prayer – *Ma’ariv, Shacharit, Musaf* and *Mincha*, we say קדשנו במצוותיך בתורתך ותן חלקנו בתורתך – Sanctify us in your mitzvot and grant us our unique stake in your Torah.
2. See his commentary to the Torah on the above verse.
3. See the commentary of the Torah Temimah, Rav Baruch HaLevy Epstein, on our *pasuk* in this week’s *parsha* regarding מורשה. He quotes the Talmud Yerushalmi (Baba Batra 8:2) which comments that מורשה as opposed to ירושה implies ‘לשון זירה’, meaning ‘perhaps’. He explains – based on the commentary of the Pnei Moshe – that this type of inheritance is not a foregone conclusion. It has an inbuilt weakness for the individual – it requires hard work and proactive investment otherwise we perhaps will not merit to receive it and pass it on.

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Who Is In the Center of the Circle?



Rabbi Reuven Taragin
Educational Director, World Mizrahi
Dean of Overseas Students, Yeshivat Hakotel

Hakafot are a central part of Sukkot and the one custom we observe on both Sukkot and Simchat Torah. What is the significance of this practice?

Sukkot — Torah in The Middle

Our *hakafot* commemorate those done in the *Beit Mikdash* around the *Mizbei'ach* upon which they sacrificed *korbanot*. In their place, we encircle the *Sefer Torah* on the *bimah* in shul. Encircling the *Sefer Torah* on the *bimah* reflects the centrality of Torah and Torah learning to Jewish life.

Simchat Torah

On Simchat Torah, the Torah moves to the periphery of the circle and becomes part of the actual *hakafot* and dancing. This begs the question: With the Torah no longer at the circle's center, what is? There are two answers to this question.

Celebrating Our Relationship With Hashem

The first answer is that Hashem is (symbolically) in the middle of the circle. The gemara tells us that in the future, Hashem will arrange a circle of *tzaddikim* in Gan Eden who dance around Him, point to Him in the middle, and proclaim: "*Hinei Elokeinu zeh, kivinu lo v'yoshi'einu* — This is our G-d, we yearned for him and he saved us."

Our Simchat Torah *hakafot* may be a similar celebration of Hashem's presence at the center of our lives. This explains why we use the same "*Hinei Elokeinu*" pasuk to introduce the *hakafot*.

We celebrate Sukkot through the fulfillment of many *mitzvot*. Once we transition to Shemini Atzeret, we no longer have these *mitzvot* to fulfill. Instead of the *sukkah*, the *four minim*, and the *Simchat Beit Hashoei'vah*, we focus our cele-

bration on the inherent *simchah* of our relationship with Hashem, whose presence in the center of the circle symbolizes His centrality in our lives.

The *Yehi Ratzon* we say before the *hakafot* also presents the *hakafot* as strengthening our relationship with Hashem. The prayer asks Hashem to allow the *hakafot* (which symbolize the circuits that topped the walls of Yericho) to remove the iron wall between Him and us and help us connect with Him and His Torah.

According to this first approach, the Torah our *hakafot* focus upon during Sukkot moves to the periphery on Simchat Torah because we now focus directly on our relationship with Hashem. After circling the Torah during Sukkot, on Simchat Torah, we take it in hand and, together with it, celebrate the relationship with Hashem it facilitates.

The Children — Our Future

A second answer to the question is that the circle focuses on our children. The Rashba mentions a custom to adorn the children with the silver crowns generally used for the *Sifrei Torah* and to put the children where we usually place the *Sifrei Torah*.

Linking our Torah and Torah *simchah* to our children celebrates having children we can teach Torah to and reminds us to pass the Torah on to future generations.

By dancing with and around our children, we pray that they too will live by and pass the Torah on to their children — a hope we express in our daily *Birkat HaTorah*:

ונהיה אנחנו וצאצאינו וצאצאי אבותינו וצאצאי עמך
בית ישראל כולנו יודעי שמך ולומדי תורתך לשמחה

(May we, our descendants, the descendants of our ancestors, and the descendants of your people, the house of Yisrael, all know Your name and learn Your

Torah for its sake).

The Torah reading for Simchat Torah includes the *pasuk* "*Torah tzivah lanu Moshe, morasha kehilat Yaakov*." This *pasuk*, the first we teach our children as soon as they come of age, defines the Torah as our eternal communal inheritance that we perpetuate from generation to generation.

The Man from Vilna

The Jewish people have had highs and lows, including moments when our future seemed bleak. Our focus on our children and raising them according to Torah values ensured our continued survival and success.

We recently experienced such a moment during and after the Holocaust. A beautiful story immortalized by a popular song powerfully expresses this idea:

...I remember liberation, joy, and fear both intertwined:

Where to go and what to do, and how to leave the pain behind.

My heart said, "Go to Vilna." Dare I pray yet once again

For the chance to find a loved one or perhaps a childhood friend?

It took many months to get there, from the late spring to the fall,

and like I, many others, close to four hundred in all,

and slowly, there was healing, broken souls now mixed with light.

When someone proudly cried out, "Simchas Torah is tonight!"

We ran as one toward the shul, our spirits in a trace,

and we tore apart the barricade — in defiance, we would dance,

but the scene before our eyes shook us to the core

scraps of *siddur*, bullet holes, bloodstains on the floor

Continued on page 7

Hoshanot & Hakafot: Circles and Salvation on Sukkot



Rabbanit Shani Taragin
Educational Director, World Mizrahi

Walking in circles is a key theme during the festival of Sukkot. The Mishna (Sukkah 4:5) describes the Second Temple practice of taking the arava branches and circling the *mizbayach* once every day of Sukkot and seven times on the seventh day while reciting *Hoshanot*. We remember this practice by circling the *bima* with our *arba minim* every day of Sukkot and seven times on Hoshana Rabba, and also through the Simchat Torah custom to circle the *bima* while singing (Rema, OC 669:3). What is the significance of these circuits and why do they play a central role during Sukkot?

Rav Acha (Yerushalmi, Sukkah 4) states that the circling of the altar on Sukkot commemorates the battle of Jericho, when the Jewish people circled the walls of Jericho for seven days after which the walls miraculously collapsed. But what is the connection between the circling of the walls of Jericho and Sukkot?

Rav Eleazar of Worms (Sefer haRokeach, Laws of Sukkot, 221) teaches that Sukkot is the time when we pray for rain. Just as at Jericho, where the Jewish people circled the walls for seven days and seven times on the seventh day and the walls came tumbling down, so too we circle the *bima* for seven days with prayers and praises to Hashem for rain, and on the seventh day, we circle seven times, asking Hashem to bring rain.

Rav Yakov Ettlinger (Aruch LaNer, Sukkah 45a) explains that the Jericho miracle was the first miracle our people experienced when entering the Land of Israel. Sukkot is *Zman Simchateinu* (the time of our joy)

when we recite the full *Hallel*, and so it is an appropriate time to commemorate the first miracle we experienced as a nation in the holy land.

A third connection can be based on the commentaries of Rabbenu Bachya and Alei Tamar, who understand the story of Jericho as a story of atonement, where the Jews repented while having judgment fall upon our enemies. Similarly, we take our *arba minim* and circle the *bima* as a petition to Hashem to cleanse us of sin and save us from our adversaries.

The most common proof text cited for the custom of a bride to circle around her groom is Yirmiyahu 31:21: “For Hashem has created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man.” In the context of the prophet's allegory, the woman symbolizes the people of Israel, who will initiate the reconciliation with her beloved, the Almighty, by circling. These seven circuits also remind us of the seven circles around Jericho, breaking the walls between bride and groom, *Am Yisrael* and *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. As there are numerous parallels between the *shofar*-blowing ceremony around Jericho and the revelation of Sinai, the seven circuits re-establish our covenantal marriage ceremony every Sukkot!

On Sukkot, we have an opportunity to break down walls – barriers that separate us from Hashem, our spouses, and community members. Jericho is described as completely enclosed and quarantined – “Jericho was shut up because of the children of Israel: None went out, and none came in.” Sukkot is a time to break down these walls as we circle the *bima*

symbolically. These are circles of prayer for rain and prosperity, circles of praise for miracles of salvation in the land of Israel, circles of atonement, and circles of marriage – breaking down barriers and rebuilding a covenant of commitment with our Beloved.

Mesechet Ta’anit concludes with a description of Tu B’Av and Yom Kippur, the happiest days of the year, when the daughters of Israel would circle dance in anticipation of marriage. They would wear borrowed white clothing to eradicate socio-economic differences and encourage unity. Ulla of Bira’a assures us that in the future, Hashem will arrange a circle-dance for all the righteous “and He will be sitting among them in the Garden of Eden, and every one of the righteous will point to G-d with his finger, as it is stated: ‘And it shall be said on that day: Behold, this is our G-d, for whom we waited, that He might save us. This is Hashem, for whom we waited. We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.’” (Isaiah 25:9) Hashem will form a circle with all the participants in equal proximity to the center. Once we break down the walls of disunity through circles of prayer and supplication (i.e. Hoshanot) on Sukkot, we anticipate the happiness of Hakafot of Simchat haTorah, providing a glimpse of the future circle of solidarity, salvation, and ultimate redemption!

Halachic Q&A



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Head, Mizrahi Rabbinic Council | Rabbi of the Gush Etzion Regional Council

Rosh Yeshivah, Jerusalem College of Technology | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot and La'Ofek

Question: How big must one's kippah be?

Answer: There are two reasons why we wear a kippah:

1) Brings us to Fearing G-d

The Gemara in *Kiddushin* 31a records the practice of Rav Hunah the son of Rav Yehoshua who did not walk four *amot* without a head covering. Rav Hunah explained his practice by saying, “the *Shechinah* is above my head.” Based on this, we can say that the *kippah* serves to remind us of the *Shechinah* above us. A similar conclusion is drawn from the Gemara in *Shabbat* 156b, where Rav Nachman's mother told her son to always wear a *kippah* so that he should have *yirat shamayim*. It seems that there is both a spiritual effect of the *kippah* which increases fear of G-d, as well as a practical, constant reminder of Hashem's presence which, when thought about, will strengthen one's *yirat shamayim*.

Wearing a *kippah* helps one remember G-d, and consequently, prevents him from performing sins. In his introduction to Shulchan Aruch, Rema writes about the significance of living in front of Hashem constantly, “*shiviti Hashem l'negdi tamid*,” and how cultivating that mindset will prevent a person from sinning. One can say that a *kippah* does just this: a constant reminder that we are standing in Hashem's presence.

Why does remembering Hashem help prevent us from sinning?

One reason is because of fear. Rebbe Yochanan blesses his students that their fear of Heaven should be upon them, such as their fear of flesh and blood (Brachot 28b). The Rema describes this not only as fear of G-d, but rather that one is embarrassed to sin when in G-d's

presence. It is not proper to sin when Hashem is by your side.

However, I think we can further analyze Rebbe Yochanan's statement and arrive at a deeper understanding. When a person constantly feels Hashem's presence, he receives strength in his service of G-d. This person feels that Hashem loves him and is guiding him through every move; he is not walking alone in the dark. In all the difficult places and circumstances that he encounters, Hashem is by his side. This powerful feeling of guidance and presence gives him strength to handle many of the challenges he will face and cling to Hashem through fulfilling his *mitzvot*, learning Torah, and performing *chesed*.

This idea is reflected in the Zohar, who writes that one should not walk four *amot* without a *kippah*, as the *Shechinah* rests on his head. Unlike the Gemara, which refers to the *Shechinah* as above the head, this presentation furthers the idea that the *Shechinah* is on our heads. Hashem is with him, close to us and providing a hand in all that we do.

Symbolizes Our Identity

The Taz provides another reason for wearing a *kippah* – *chukat hagoyim*. He writes that non-Jews remove their hats when they sit down, and therefore we keep our head coverings on. Nowadays, this reason of *chukat hagoyim* does not seem to apply (Mate Ephraim and Yechave Da'at). Nevertheless, the *kippah* still remains a symbol of acceptance of Hashem's kingship and a defining element of what it means to be a Jew.

Symbols are extremely meaningful and significant. The Gemara in Sanhedrin 74b says that if all Jews tie their shoes the same way, it should not be changed

even in times of religious persecution. We experience this in many areas of life. It hurts to see somebody disgracing an Israeli flag. It is only a flag, yet it means so much more. Likewise, wearing a *kippah* shows who we are a part of, who is our King, and what we believe in.

We must always remember that we are happy to be Jews and not embarrassed! We are happy to be servants of G-d! This is how the Rema concludes his introduction to Shulchan Aruch:

“And one should not be ashamed because of people who mock him in his service of G-d”

It is our duty to fulfill the will of G-d by acting in His ways and even dressing in accordance to His will, even if this means being different from those around us. We must rejoice in our religious identity and not feel embarrassed. Oftentimes, people don't want to wear clothes that make them seem associated with the “*dosim*” (religious). They fear wearing too big of a *kippah* or dressing too modestly. We are not afraid. On the contrary – we are happy and proud to wave our flag – the flag of Hashem.

Size?

The question of the size of the *kippah* may depend on the different reasons we have given. If the *kippah* functions to help our *yirat shamayim*, then:

- If this is a spiritual effect, then the *kippah* may need to cover most of the head.
- If this is to remind us, then seemingly the size only needs to be enough for one to realize it is there.

However, if the *kippah* functions to serve as a declaration of religion and beliefs, it does seem that the *kippah* should be large enough to be seen clearly.

Continued on next page

לפני פטירתו

הרבנית שרון רימון
Tanach teacher and author



ברכת הארץ והן את ברכת יעקב – ברכת השלטון על האויבים. וכלל הברכות מכילות בנוסף את ברכת הארץ ואת ברכת הקשר המיוחד בין עם ישראל לקב"ה, המתבטא בעיקר בקבלת התורה ובהגנה של ה' על עם ישראל במלחמת כיבוש הארץ.

משה, מנהיגם של בני ישראל ואביהם מצד אחד, ו"איש הא-להים" מצד שני, ממשיך את דרכם של אבות האומה המברכים את בניהם לפני מותם, וממשיך גם את דרכו של הקב"ה לברך את עולמו בכלל ואת בני האדם בפרט. התורה פותחת בברכת ה' לעולם ולבני האדם, ומסתיימת בהעברת הברכה הא-להית לכל שבטי ישראל, אשר כל אחד מקבל את הברכה הראויה לו באופן ספציפי וביחד הברכה לעם ישראל כוללת את כל הברכות, ומתוך ברכת עם ישראל אמור להתברך העולם כולו, כברכת ה' ליעקב: "וְנִבְרַךְ בְּךָ כָּל מְשֻׁפָּחַת הָאֲדָמָה וּבְזָרְעָךָ" (בראשית כ"ח, יד).

בברכה הניתנת לנח עם יציאתו מהתיבה. ברכות אלו מיועדות לכלל המין האנושי.

עם בחירתו של אברהם, הוא מקבל מאת ה' את ברכת הזרע, שהיא ברכת הפריין וריבוי, ובנוסף לכך הוא מקבל גם את ברכת הארץ ואת הברכה הרוחנית – הברית עם ה'. ברכות אלה מיועדות למשפחת אברהם (ולא לכל האנושות), ומציבות את אברהם כמקור לברכות לבני האדם האחרים, כתוצאה מהקשר המיוחד בינו לבין הקב"ה המעניק לו את היכולת לברך אחרים: "וְהָיָה בְּרַכְּךָ... וְנִבְרַכְּךָ בְּךָ כָּל מְשֻׁפָּחַת הָאֲדָמָה" (בראשית י"ב, ג-ג). ברכות אברהם עוברות ליצחק בנו, אשר מעביר אותן ליעקב לפני מותו. גם יעקב מברך את בניו לפני מותו, אך נראה שרק אל יוסף הוא פונה אישית בלשון 'ברכה', ואת שאר הבנים הוא מברך בברכה כללית בסוף דבריו.

משה מעביר את ברכות האבות אל בני ישראל, כציבור, וכעת הברכה מתחלקת בין השבטים – יוסף וראובן זוכים לברכת הריבוי והפריין, לוי ובנימין מתברכים בברכת הרוחניות, ואילו יהודה, לוי, יוסף ודן זוכים לברכת הצלחה במלחמה הכוללת הן את

ה תורה מסתיימת עם פטירתו של משה רבנו, גדול הנביאים והמנהיגים שקמו לישראל. נתינת התורה הייתה בדרגת נבואתו הייחודית של משה, ומכאן ואילך, הקשר עם ה' והדברים שייאמרו ויכתבו יהיו בדרגת נבואה רגילה, ולא בדרגת 'תורה'.

לפני פטירתו, מברך משה את ישראל כשם שאב מברך את בניו לפני מותו. יחסו של משה אל ישראל לאורך כל שנות מנהיגותו, החל מיציאת מצרים דרך כל הנדודים במדבר – הוא כיחס אב לבניו, וכשם שאב מברך את בניו לפני מותו, כך משה מברך את בני ישראל.

אמנם מכיוון שהתורה איננה סיפור חייו של משה אלא היא תורת ה', אין מדובר בפרידה אישית ממנהיג גדול גרידא, אלא הברכות כוללות גם רובד עמוק יותר, של ברכה א-להית.

מרגע בריאתו של העולם מלווה אותו ברכת ה', אשר בלעדיה אין לעולם קיום. ה' מברך את האדם בברכת הפריין, ומברך את השבת בברכה רוחנית. לאחר המבול מתחדשת ברכת ה' לאדם ולעולם,

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Turning to the eastern wall, we looked on in despair
There would be no scrolls to dance with – the holy ark was bare
Then we heard two children crying, a boy and girl whom no one knew
and we realized that no children were among us but those two

We danced round and round in circles as if the world had done no wrong
from evening until morning
filling up the shul with song.

Though we had no *Sifrei Torah* to clutch and hold up high,
in their place, we held those children
Am Yisrael Chai

.....the Jewish People WILL live on.....
(The Man From Vilna, Journeys)

Let's use Simchat Torah to ensure that we appreciate the great gift of our children, our responsibility to help them appreciate the beauty of our Torah and the great *zechut* of passing it on to their own children in the future.

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Shu't Yechave Da'at writes that there is no obligation for the *kippah* to cover most of the head; but it must be seen from all sides. However, he *paskins* that one must cover most of the head for *shema* and *tefillah* and *birkat hamazon*.

In practice, the *kippah* does not need to cover the majority of the head, even for *tefillah* and *birkat hamazon*. It suffices as

long as it stands out and one can tell that he is accepting Hashem's kingship. While a smaller *kippah* is enough to remind the one who is wearing it, it is best to wear one which can be seen from all sides. There is additional *hiddur* for the *kippah* to be bigger, both because of the *chumrah* of *tefillah* and *birkat hamazon*, and because it represents Jewish pride, association with Torah and *mitzvot*, and

acknowledgment of life's mission of bringing honor to Hashem's name.

We should merit, *Be'ezrat Hashem*, to be good messengers of Hashem, to rejoice in his service, and to sanctify His name through our ways.

● Compiled by Yaakov Panitch.

Alone with Torah: Happiness on Simchat Torah



Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir
World Mizrahi Scholars-in-Residence

Simchat Torah is almost here. Chana Schneerson, the mother of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, described a Simchat Torah celebration with her husband Levi Yitzchak that can be a source of inspiration for us today. The communist regime had opposed her husband's activities in promoting Torah learning and practice and arrested him in 1939. For one year he was interrogated and tortured in Stalin's prisons until he was finally exiled to a distant village in Kazakhstan. This is what Chana Schneerson wrote about Simchat Torah in that remote location:

"The day of Simchat Torah had arrived. A Sefer Torah was not yet in our possession. My husband and I were all alone in our room. The moment for *hakafot* arrived when, in the synagogue, the Torah scrolls are carried around the platform where the Torah is read. For a soul of little worth such as myself, it is difficult to describe the splendor on the face of my husband when he began to declare in a loud voice: 'You have been shown to know that the Lord, He is G-d; there is none else beside Him.' He chanted the words of the verse in the same way that he was accustomed to chanting them in our city's synagogue in the presence of hundreds of Jews. It's not only that Jews were dancing each year in our city but that even the stones would dance from the abundance of joy. It was this joy with which my husband girded himself here too. He chanted each verse and after every *hakafah* he sang and danced -- all by himself, of course. Between our table

and bed there was a small area where he danced around and around: 'Pure and upright One, deliver us, benevolent and bestower of goodness answer us on the day we call.' Upon hearing these words the feelings of his heart and his desire for pure joy were felt within myself. 'Knower of thoughts, deliver us. Garbed in righteousness, answer us on the day we call.' I sat in a corner on a wooden bench and contemplated the greatness and awesome power of this man's love for Torah, who danced all seven *hakafot*. The next morning my husband chanted 'Rejoice and exult on Simchat Torah' with the same vitality he displayed the night before."

On that Simchat Torah, Chana and Levi Yitzchak Schneerson were ostensibly alone. Without a Sefer Torah. Without a congregation. Almost without food. But they were not alone. Torah was with them, and so was joy.



Something festive is happening this week and it would be a shame to miss it.

Immediately after Simchat Torah, the most fundamental and classic learning cycle in Judaism begins. With all due respect (and much respect is due) to the daily page of Gemara, the daily Mishnah, the daily *halacha*, the daily Rambam, and all other such daily learning commitments, this week we start from the beginning of everything: parashat Bereishit. "In the beginning, G-d created the heavens and the earth." The weekly Torah portion is divided into seven parts, and it

is customary to learn one part each day of the week with Rashi's commentary.

It's possible to learn the weekly Torah portion alone, or with our spouse, with our children, or with our parents, with grandpa and grandma, or with a friend. The parasha can be found on Google and many commentaries on every Torah verse are available on sefaria.org. And then, of course, it's possible to acquire a book containing one or more of the multitude of commentaries on the Torah, or simply to open a Chumash and dive in or -- perhaps I should say -- take off.

This is not a study of history but of current events, of what is happening today. The Torah speaks to us and about us. A daily study of Torah, even if only for a few minutes, imparts stability and sanity at a time when we are in great need of them. We have an opportunity to make a choice with eternal significance: the choice of daily Torah study.



שמחת תורה, החג האחרון של תשרי. בתפילות, בריקודי ההקפות עם ספרי התורה ביד ובהרבה שמחה -- אנחנו מסיימים את המחזור השנתי של קריאת התורה כולה.

ומה המהות של היום הזה? מה הסיבה לשמחה? האדמו"ר הרב יצחק מאיר אלטר אמר כך: "מי שמביט מבחוץ, חושב שאנחנו שמחים כי סיימנו לקרוא את התורה, אבל האמת היא שאנחנו שמחים כי אנחנו מתחילים לקרוא אותה מיד מחדש, מבראשית."

חג שמח!



Continued on next page

The Heart of the Torah



Rabbi Danny Mirvis
Deputy CEO, World Mizrahi
Rabbi of Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

“**N**ever again has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moshe, whom Hashem had known face to face. (As evident) by all the signs and the wonders that Hashem had sent him to perform in the Land of Egypt to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land. And by all the strong hand and by all the great power that Moshe performed before the eyes of all Israel” (Devarim 34:10-12).

With these words, which describe the supremacy of Moshe’s prophecy, we complete *V’zot HaBracha* and our annual Torah reading cycle. Whilst celebrating this milestone on Simchat Torah, we do not wait for the next Shabbat to recommence with the book of Bereishit, but straight away return to the very beginning of the Torah:

“In the beginning, G-d created heaven and earth” (Bereishit 1:1).

This immediate recommencement of the cycle comes to highlight the continuity of Torah, our love of Torah, and that however many times we may have completed the Torah, there is still more to learn.

Numerous explanations are given for the fact that the Torah begins with the letter “bet” (of “Bereishit”) and finishes with the letter “lamed” (of “Yisrael”).



The love of our fellow man is not only essential to truly receiving Torah, but is particularly vital in passing it on as well.

The Kli Yakar concludes his commentary of the Torah by explaining that *bet* and *lamed* are the only two letters of the Hebrew alphabet that form complete words when placed before the three letters that comprise Hashem’s four-letter name (“yud” followed by “hay” followed by “vav” followed by “hay”) i.e. *bet yud* (“bi” – in me), *bet vav* (“bo” – in him), *bet hay* (“bah” – in her), *lamed yud* (“li” – to me), *lamed vav* (“lo” – to him) and *lamed hay* (“lah” – to her) are all complete Hebrew words. *Bet* and *lamed* are therefore the two letters that represent the unity of Hashem’s name and come to teach us that everything begins and ends with Hashem.

Other commentators point out that the letters *lamed* and *bet* spell out the word “lev” (heart) i.e., the heart is the link between the completion of the Torah and its recommencement and the heart

performs this linking role in numerous ways.

First, our Torah learning cannot be a purely academic or intellectual exercise. To ensure the continuity of Torah and to ensure the recommencement of our Torah reading year after year, we must be emotionally connected to Torah as well.

Second, the continuity of Torah goes hand in hand with the love of our fellow man. Torah study which is not accompanied by pleasant character traits and concern for others is flawed. Torah without a heart is not Torah. The love of our fellow man is not only essential to truly receiving Torah, but is particularly vital in passing it on as well.

Third, our devotion and commitment to Torah should be as constant as the beating of the heart. Whilst an emotional connection to the Torah is essential, emotion can be fickle and must be accompanied by commitment.

As we renew our Torah reading cycle, we should renew our passion and love for Torah, our commitment to Torah and our love for our fellow man.

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הפשוטה והגאונית ביותר – לומדים תורה. כבר אלפי שנים הלימוד הוא ה-DNA של העם שלנו, “עם הספר”. לא רק הילדים חוזרים (סוף סוף!) ללימודים. כולנו מתחילים ללמוד מחדש, מתחילים מבראשית. שנת תורה טובה.

נקרא “שמחת תורה”. בו אנחנו מקבלים את התשובה איך להמשיך את תשרי עמוק אל תוך ימי השגרה. הקשר לתורה הוא-הוא הסוד. ביום האחרון ברצף החגים מסיימים את ספר דברים, מתחילים מייד את ספר בראשית, וממשיכים את הדופק הנצחי הזה. פרשת השבוע תמשיך ללוות אותנו כל השנה. בסוף חגי תשרי אנחנו לא מתנתקים, אנחנו מיישמים את הרעיונות הגדולים בחיי היומיום שלנו בצורה

איך חוזרים לשגרה? תשרי הוא חודש מאוד אינטנסיבי. ראש השנה, עשרת ימי תשובה, סליחות, יום כיפור, סוכות, חול המועד – ומה עכשיו?

את המתכון להמשך קבלנו ביום האחרון. חז“ל מספרים שאחרי כל החגים, אלוקים מבקש מעם ישראל: הישארו עימי עוד יום אחד. אז הנה, נשארנו, אבל גם היום הזה ייגמר, ומה אז? ובכן, היום הזה

Quiet Time



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt”l

Sukkot represents more clearly than any other festival the dualities of Judaism. The four species (*lulav, etrog, hadassim and aravot*) are a symbol of the land of Israel, while the *sukkah* reminds us of exile. The four species are a ritual of rain, while eating in the *sukkah* depends on the absence of rain. Above all, though, there is the tension between the universality of nature and the particularity of history. There is an aspect of Sukkot – rainfall, harvest, climate – to which everyone can relate, but there is another – the long journey through the wilderness – that speaks to the unique experience of the Jewish people.

This tension between the universal and the particular is unique to Judaism. The G-d of Israel is the G-d of all humanity, but the religion of Israel is not the religion of all humanity. It is conspicuous that while the other two Abrahamic monotheisms, Christianity and Islam, borrowed much from Judaism, they did not borrow this. They became universalist faiths, believing that everyone ought to embrace the one true religion, their own, and that those who do not are denied the blessings of eternity.

Judaism disagrees. For this it was derided for many centuries, and to some degree it still is today. Why, if it represents religious truth, is it not to be shared with everyone? If there is only one G-d, why is there not only one way to salvation? There is no doubt that if Judaism had become an evangelising, conversion-driven religion – as it would have had to, had it believed in universalism – there would be many more Jews than there are



Judaism is the road less travelled, because it represents a complex truth that could not be expressed in any other way.

today. A recent study (the Pew Report, undertaken in 2015) found that there are an estimated 2.3 billion Christians, 1.8 billion Muslims and only 14 million Jews. The disparity is vast.

Judaism is the road less travelled, because it represents a complex truth that could not be expressed in any other way. The Torah tells a simple story. G-d gave humans the gift of freedom, which they then used not to enhance creation but to endanger it. Adam and Chavah broke the first prohibition. Kayin, the first human child, became the first murderer. Within a remarkably short space of time, all flesh had corrupted its way on earth, the world was filled with violence, and only one man, Noach, found favour in G-d's eyes. After the Flood, G-d made a covenant with Noach, and through him with all humanity, but after the hubris of the builders of the Tower of Babel, G-d chose another way. Having established a basic threshold in the form of the Noachide Laws, He then chose one man, one family, and eventually one nation, to become a living example of what it is to exist closely and continuously in the presence of G-d. There are, in the affairs of humankind, universal laws

and specific examples. The Noachide covenant constitutes the universal laws. The way of life of Avraham and his descendants is the example.

What this means in Judaism is that the righteous of all the nations have a share in the World to Come (Sanhedrin 105a). In contemporary terms it means that our common humanity precedes our religious differences. It also means that by creating all humans in His image, G-d set us the challenge of seeing His image in one who is not in our image: whose colour, culture, class and creed are different from our own. The ultimate spiritual challenge is to see the trace of G-d in the face of a stranger.

Zechariah, in the vision we read as the Haftarah for the first day of Sukkot, puts this precisely. He says that in the End of Days, “Hashem shall be King over all the earth; on that day Hashem shall be One and His name One” (Zechariah 14:9), meaning that all the nations will recognise the sovereignty of a single transcendent G-d. Yet at the same time, Zechariah envisages the nations participating only in Sukkot, the most universal of the festivals, and the one in which they have the greatest interest since they all need rain. He does not envisage them becoming Jews, accepting the “yoke of the commands”, all 613 of them. He does not speak of their conversion. The practical outcome of this dual theology – the universality of G-d and the particularity of Torah – is that we are commanded to be true to our faith, and a blessing to others, regardless of their faith. That is the Jewish way.

Shemini Atzeret reminds us of the intimacy Jews have always felt in the presence of G-d. The cathedrals of Europe convey a sense of the vastness of G-d and the smallness of humankind. The small shuls of Tzfat, where the Arizal and Rabbi Yosef Caro prayed, convey a sense of the closeness of G-d and the greatness of humankind. Jews, except when they sought to imitate other nations, did not build cathedrals. Even the Beit HaMikdash reached its greatest architectural grandeur under Herod, a man better known for his political ruthlessness than his spiritual sensibilities.



Shemini Atzeret reminds us of the intimacy Jews have always felt in the presence of G-d.

When all the universality of Judaism has been expressed, there remains something that cannot be universalised: that sense of intimacy with and closeness to G-d that we feel on Shemini

Atzeret, when all the other guests have left. Shemini Atzeret is chamber music, not a symphony. It is a quiet time with G-d. We are reluctant to leave, and we dare to think that He is reluctant to see us go. Justice is universal, love is particular. There are some things we share because we are human. But there are other things, constitutive of our identity, that are uniquely ours - most importantly our relationships to those who form our family. On Sukkot we are among strangers and friends. On Shemini Atzeret we are with family.

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Shemini Atseres and Simchas Torah: One Simcha



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

The prohibition against getting married on *Shabbos* is rabbinic in origin. It was part of the *gezeirah* against *mekach u'memkar* (buying and selling) *shemo yichtov* (lest one write by mistake). However, the prohibition against marrying on *yom tov* or even on *chol hamoed* is Biblical based on the principle of *ein mearvin simcha besimcha*. On *yom tov*, and even on *chol hamoed*, there is a *mitzvah* to rejoice, and one who marries is engaged in a different form of *simcha*, which detracts from the *simcha* of *Yom Tov*. (On *Shabbos* there is no *mitzvah* of *simcha*, hence no problem of contradiction).

In Talmudic times there were several differences between the practices of the Jewish community in Babylonia and the practices of the communities in *Eretz Yisrael*. One of these differences was regarding *krias haTorah*. In Babylonia they would complete the reading of the entire Torah every year on the last day of *Sukkos*, hence the name *Simchas Torah*. In *Eretz Yisrael* each *sedra* (read each *Shabbos*) was only about one-third the length of the *sedros* read in Babylonia, hence it would take about three years to complete the entire Torah. *Simchas Torah* would only be celebrated once every three years, upon the completion of the entire Torah. Already in the times of the Rambam the practice all over the world had followed that of Bavel, to celebrate *Simchas Torah* every year, on the last day of *Sukkos*.

The Achronim raise a problem regarding this practice: Why is this celebration not in violation of the principle of *ein mearvim simcha besimcha*? On *Sukkos* there is clearly a *mitzvah* of *simcha*, and the celebration of the *siyum* of the Torah also certainly

involves an element of *simcha*. Why should we not insist on observing *Simchas Torah* only on a *Shabbos* or a weekday, as opposed to having the celebration on a *yom tov*?

Perhaps the answer to that question lies in the nature of the *yom tov* of *Shemini Atseres*. Each of the *yomim tovim* has its own theme. The theme of *Pesach* is the redemption from Egypt, on *Shavuot* it is *Mattan Torah* and the theme on *Sukkos* is the ability of the Jewish people to have survived miraculously throughout the years of the *galus*. For seven days we leave our permanent home and dwell in the shaky *sukkah*, with very little protection. We rely on the Divine protection, which has maintained the Jewish people throughout the years, despite all odds against survival. In the language of Rav Kook, *zt"l*, the continued existence of the Jewish people is a "*halacha leMoshe miSinai*" (i.e., there is no rational way to explain it).

What is the theme of *Shemini Atseres*? The *halacha* declares *Shemini Atseres* as a separate *yom tov*, and is not merely the last two days of *Sukkos*. (This is the reason that the *brocho* "*shehechyanu*" is recited at the end of the *Kiddush* on the evening of *Shemini Atseres*, but not on the evening of the last days of *Pesach*. *Shemini Atseres* is a separate *Yom Tov*, and has not been celebrated since a year ago). What is the special theme of the new *Yom Tov*?

Rashi, in his commentary on the Torah (*Vayikra* 23:36), quotes from the *tanaim* that after the seven days of *Sukkos* are all over, and the millions of Jews have spent their *yom tov* in Jerusalem (fulfilling *aliya laregel*), *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* exclaims, "I love you so much; I find it difficult

to say goodbye; please stay on another day". *Shemini Atseres* does not come to commemorate any particular historical event, but rather to emphasize *bechiras Yisrael*, the uniqueness of *Am Yisrael*. From all the nations of the world, the Jews alone were chosen to be designated as "*bonim lamakom*," as "*bni bechori Yisroel*."

The entire uniqueness of the Jewish people lies in the fact that the *malach* (angel) teaches every baby the entire Torah before he or she is born. The *simcha* of the completion of the entire Torah is not something separate from the *simcha* of the *yom tov*. The whole essence of the *yom tov* of *Shemini Atseres* is interconnected with Torah study. Only through Torah study did we become the *Am Hanivchar*, and hence our *minhag* of celebrating the *simcha* of completing the learning of the entire Torah not only does not compete with the *simcha* of the *yom tov* of *Shemini Atseres*, it rather complements it and enhances it.

Why the Redundancy?



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This week we will talk about an idea on Shemini Atzeret, and its relationship to the rest of the *Yom Tov* of Sukkot. In Parshat Re'eh, at the end of the discussion about the holidays, there are a couple of *pesukim* that talk about the *mitzvah* to be happy on Sukkot. The first *pasuk* begins with “וְשִׂמְחֶתְךָ בְּחֻגְךָ”, and the following *pasuk* ends with “וְהָיִיתָ, אַךְ שְׂמֵחַ.” Although when we sing the popular song on Sukkot, we combine these two *pesukim*, in fact they are two separate *pesukim*, both referring to the *mitzvah* to be happy on Sukkot, and really, *Yom Tov* in general. The question is why do we need two different *pesukim* seemingly talking about the same thing, and what can this teach us about the nature of the שמחה on Sukkot?

In terms of the redundancy within the *pesukim*, Rashi brings a first suggestion based on the simple read of the *pesukim* that על פי פשוט, the first *pasuk* is a commandment and the second *pasuk* is a promise. Rashi thinks that ושמחת בחגך is the main *mitzvah* that commands us to be happy on *Yom Tov*, and from there the Gemara in מסכת פסחים learns of the obligation to eat meat and drink wine, since “אין שמחה אלא בשר ויין”. On the other hand, the second *pasuk* is Hashem merely saying that at the end of day, if we have fulfilled all the *mitzvot* and celebrated *Yom Tov* properly, then we will be happy. The second *pasuk* is no longer a מצוה, but rather a הבטחה from Hashem. This is all Rashi based on the פשוט of the *pesukim*.

However, Rashi in his second explanation quotes from the Gemara in מסכת סוכה that the second *pasuk* is specifically coming to include Shemini Atzeret. The Gemara says that “והיית אך שמח לרבות לילי יום טוב האחרון”. In addition to whatever שמחה is incumbent



As the holiday season comes to a close, and we have finished with the Yamim Noraim and the first 7 days of Sukkot, the Torah requires a deeper element of simcha on Shemini Atzeret.

upon us the rest of Sukkot from the first *pasuk* of “וּשְׂמַחְתָּ בַחֲגֹךָ”, on Shemini Atzeret there is a separate element of שמחה learning from the *pasuk* of “וְהָיִיתָ אַךְ שְׂמֵחַ.” Based on this explanation of Rashi, both *pesukim* are referring to a commandment to be happy, just the first *pasuk* is referring to the first seven days of Sukkot, and the second *pasuk* is referring to the last day of Sukkot. However, both of these points in Rashi need some explanation. What does Rashi mean when he says that לפי הפשוט the second *pasuk* is a הבטחה, but לפי הדריש (based on the Gemara's explanation) the second *pasuk* is also a command? And furthermore, based on the Gemara's explanation that both are referring to a commandment to be happy, why do we need separate *mitzvot* about being happy on the first seven days of Sukkot and being happy on the last day of Sukkot, instead of just having an overall *mitzvah* about being happy on all 8 days of Sukkot? Lastly, separate from Rashi's explanation, the second *pasuk* is itself confusing, as it includes the word “אך”, which typically acts as a limiting factor. Who or what are we limiting from the שמחה when we say “וְהָיִיתָ אַךְ שְׂמֵחַ”? Through all of these different questions, perhaps we can arrive

at a deeper understanding of the שמחה of Shemini Atzeret.

The שמחה of *Yom Tov* in general is that of ושמחת בחגך, which we said teaches us the *mitzvah* to eat meat and drink wine. Having a beautiful *Yom Tov* meal, and in the times of the *Beit Hamikdash* having the meat of the קרבנות, definitely brings about great joy, yet it is a more surface level joy. To use the wording of Rashi, it is “לפי פשוט”, a more simplistic joy that all can tap into. In essence, this *pasuk* encapsulates all the external factors that relate to the happiness on *Yom Tov*, albeit a very important *mitzvah*, yet still more of an external feeling. This aspect applies for the *Yomim Tovim*. Yet, the Torah is commanding us to have an additional element of שמחה on the last day of Sukkot. As the holiday season comes to a close, and we have finished with the ימים נוראים and the first 7 days of Sukkot, the Torah requires a deeper element of שמחה on Shemini Atzeret. This שמחה is that of “דרוש”, a joy of פנימיות, that requires a deeper appreciation of everything that we just experienced. This is what the *pasuk* means when it says “וְהָיִיתָ אַךְ שְׂמֵחַ”, and this is what Rashi means that on a deeper level, this refers to the שמחה of specifically Shemini Atzeret. This is much harder to tap into, and for that reason there is a מיעוט, since not everyone can achieve this deeper level of appreciation. Yet, while it is more difficult, it is this that the Torah requires from us on Shemini Atzeret, to look back at the time period that we just went through, and internalize with true happiness all of the spiritual growth that we achieved.

● Edited by Jay Eisenstadt and Ari Levine.

Simchat Torah: Flying the Flag for Continuity



Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis KBE

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“**A**braham was like an *etrog*.” This astonishing statement in the Midrash Torat Kohanim cries out for an explanation. The answer will shed light not only on the life and character of our patriarch Abraham, but also on the aspirations we have for our Jewish children in challenging times.

The Gemara points to the Torah’s description of the *etrog* as *pri etz hadar*, the fruit of the citrus tree (Succah 35a). The Gemara explains that the term *hadar* also literally means “which lives” or “resides.”

This refers to a fascinating feature of the *etrog*. The fruit never falls from the branch, not even when it is ripe. It remains connected to its roots and its life source until the moment when it is plucked from the tree, to serve its ultimate spiritual purpose.

The *etrog*, therefore, is a powerful symbol of abiding commitment, loyalty and continuity, which were the key features of the character of Abraham, the founder of our faith.

Continuity is a key theme of Simchat Torah, when we conclude the reading of the Torah and recommence it immediately.

We go to great lengths to ensure that our children enjoy the festivities. They sit atop our shoulders, as we sing and dance around the Sefer Torah. We offer them sweet treats to honour the words of King David in the Psalms that “the commandments of Hashem are sweeter than honey.” We invite them to take part

in the beautiful custom of *Kol Hane’arim* when they gather under a large *tallit*, held above their heads for a very special *aliyah*, after which their parents offer the moving blessing, “May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac....”

This is the blessing of Jewish continuity, that just as we have faithfully embarked on yet another cycle of reading the Torah, may this next generation similarly continue to embody the precepts and principles that were first handed down by Abraham to Isaac.

What a moving blessing for a parent to give: may your values be the values of our family and our forebears, stretching back thousands of years.

In reality, realising this aspiration is far from simple. The question of whether we will have Jewish grandchildren remains as pertinent now as it was when my predecessor, Rabbi Sacks, asked it in the ‘90s. There is no silver bullet.

Parents will always have to grapple with the challenge of how to ensure that their children take their place in the story of the Jewish people. However, I believe that the place to begin answering this question is in the lesson set for us by our patriarchs themselves.

Abraham’s deep-rooted faith inspired him to engage in enthusiastic, uncompromising commitment to G-d. Nothing could stop him from dispensing *chesed*, acts of loving kindness towards others, even when he was recovering from his *brit milah*.

Despite failing to convince G-d to save the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, he returned the very next day to connect with his Creator in the same place where he had always stood in prayer.

Walking in Abraham’s footsteps, Isaac was prepared to give his life in the service of G-d, when it appeared that was what He required. He would go on to provide a similarly powerful upbringing for his own son, Jacob. Despite his move to idolatrous Mesopotamia for 22 long years, Jacob remarkably remained totally committed to his heritage.

One generation later, Jacob’s son Joseph, would similarly incorporate the teachings of his parents into his leadership role in Egypt. Despite his wealth, power and influence, his allegiance was to G-d alone, proudly displaying his values and the beauty of his faith for all others to see and respect.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein used to teach that children internalise values based on the example set by their parents. Children are astonishingly perceptive from a very young age.

Many people construct a particular persona for their professional, communal and social life, but when they arrive home, relax and drop their guard, their children learn who their parents really are. Are they sincere or insincere? Do they speak in a gentle, sensitive way, or do they shout and rant? Do they maintain high standards of morality or not? When it comes to *mitzvot*, do they try to cut corners, or are they genuinely committed to Torah observance?

Continued on next page

The Gift the Angels Don't Have



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The Gemara (Shabbat) tells us that when Moshe Rabbeinu went up to *Har Sinai*, the *malachim* (angels) confronted him, complaining that G-d was giving the Torah to Moshe and not to them. Moshe responds, "It says in Your Torah, 'I am the L-rd your G-d who brought you out of the land of Egypt.' Angels, were you taken out of Egypt? It says in Your Torah don't worship other gods. Angels, do you ever have a desire to worship other gods? It says in the Torah 'honor your father and your mother.' Angels, do you have parents? It says in the Torah 'don't kill, don't steal, don't covet.' Angels. Do these apply to you?"

The Gemara says the angels recognized the truth of Moshe's argument and gave the Torah to him with no complaints. They even gave him gifts on his way down.

Many commentaries ask, what were the *malachim* thinking? They knew what it said in the Torah, they knew who it was for, and yet they still wanted it. Why?

Some commentaries suggest the *malachim* knew the Torah existed on many different levels. פשט, רמז, חסד, סוד stands for פשט, רמז, חסד, סוד - four different levels of interpretation, from the simple to the mystically sublime. The angels recognized that the *pshat*, the simple interpretation,

didn't apply to them, but they wanted to have the Torah in order to appreciate the deeper ideas. The Gemara answers that, yes, the deeper ideas and all the different levels are significant, but only if you live by the Torah. If you live by the *pshat* of the Torah - like human beings do - you can appreciate even the deeper levels.

The angels, who do not live by the Torah, cannot change their appreciation level.

As we take a step back from that Gemara, let us look to Simchat Torah, when we essentially celebrate the many different levels of understanding and appreciating the Torah.

The Gemara (Menachot 30) describes a *machloket tannaim* regarding the author of the last eight verses of the Torah that describe Moshe Rabbeinu's death. One opinion says Moshe Rabbeinu wrote them בדמעות - in tears. How could Moshe have written them? Can one describe one's own death after the fact? What does that mean? The second opinion holds that Yehoshua bin Nun wrote the last eight verses. That sounds a little strange too, but it is certainly more logical than Moshe Rabbeinu writing about his own demise.

The Vilna Gaon suggests a fascinating idea. דמעות can mean tears, but it could also

come from the word מְדוּמָע, mixed up. The Ramban tells us that on a deeper level, the entire Torah spells out the names of G-d. When Moshe Rabbeinu received the Torah from G-d, he received it in a decoded fashion. It didn't spell out the names of G-d anymore. The Torah was spelled out in a way mere mortals could understand. The Vilna Gaon suggests that the last eight verses of the Torah were given to Moshe בְּדַמְעָא - as a mixture - in its pristine, original, coded and 'mixed-up' state. It did not say וימת משה שם (and Moshe died there). It said the name of G-d on a hidden, deeper level. After Moshe died, G-d decoded it for Yehoshua bin Nun to spell out the exact verses.

As we celebrate Simchat Torah, the end of the festive cycle, both of the *Yamim Noraim* and the *Shalosh Regalim*, let us recognize the unique gift of Torah. Let us try to live it on a *pshat* level and as we grow level by level, may we be *zoche* to appreciate it even more and plunge the Divine depths of its wisdom.

Continued from previous page

Our children are our mirror. Children who see their parents, teachers and other adult role models wholeheartedly embracing a life of Jewish values and celebrating a life of uncompromising commitment to Torah

and *mitzvot* are far more likely to live their own lives in a similar way.

If our children see us as an *etrog*, never disconnected from our roots, they will surely wish to set a similar example for their own children, in turn.

This Simchat Torah, as we celebrate the continuity of Jewish life, may we find renewed inspiration to set the right example for our children for generations to come.

Moshe's Death and Chag HaSuccos



Michal Horowitz
Judaic Studies Teacher

Though the final *parsha* of the *Chumash* does not merit its own Shabbos, and with the hectic nature of *Simchas Torah* it is possible, *keviyachol*, to forget that on this day the cycle of *Chumash* ends, *V'Zos Ha'Bracha* is a monumental and powerful *sedra*. After blessing each tribe with its own unique blessing, Moshe *Rabbeinu* ascends to the summit of *Har Navo*, where, at the age of one hundred and twenty years, he leaves this world for the next.

After commanding Moshe to view *Eretz Yisrael* 'but to there you shall not cross' (Devarim 34:4), Hashem takes Moshe's *neshama* to the *olam ha'neshamos*, the *olam ha'emes*. And there Moshe died, the servant of Hashem, in the land of Moav, by the word of Hashem (v.5).

In regard to the death of Moshe, Rashi tells us that the nation could not believe that their leader, a mortal closer to G-d than any other before or after him, would leave this world.

Even the great Moshe *Rabbeinu*, the one who spoke to Hashem 'face to face, with a clear vision and not in riddles' (Bamidbar 12:8), would not live in this world forever. And Moshe was one hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eye had not dimmed, nor had he lost his freshness (34:7). Despite the vigor of his youth which did not leave him, his days in this world were over, his *tafkid* completed, and his mission accomplished; Moshe's day of death had come.

It is not for naught that we read this *sedra* on *Simchas Torah*, the final days of the rejoicing of Tishrei and the culmination of *Chag Ha'Succos*. What is the message and lesson of the *Succah*, a message we are meant to carry with us throughout

the entire year? Rav Avigdor Miller *zt'l* writes, "Among all of the attitudes of the mind that every person must develop, he must also take time to think about this burning question: What does my state of existence in this world look like?"

"Now when a child is born he knows right away the state of his existence. He's here to stay. If you tell him stories about people who die, he doesn't really believe it, or at least it doesn't apply to him. He thinks he knows *tzuras omdo b'olam*, he's 'a permanent resident' in this world. Actually, almost everybody retains this juvenile attitude all his life. Of course, he knows all about *misah* (death), but it's very far from his mind. He has ten thousand years left, at least. That's his recognition of *tzuras omdo b'olam*, he's here and he's here to stay.

"It's of utmost importance to 'recognize the actual form of our existence here' (Chovos HaLevavos): that we are only visitors. This is a hotel and we are *orchim*; we spend a little time here and then we move on. *In succos you shall dwell for seven days* (Vayikra 23:42). It's a *mitzvah* that if used the way HKB"Y intended, will have the most far-reaching results in our lives, not only on Succos, but in Cheshvan and Kislev and all the rest of the year. Sitting in the *succah*, if you learn how to do it, affects our entire attitude and our entire success in this world. One of the most important features of the *succah* is that it's a *diras arai*; a temporary dwelling... The purpose is to tell us 'leave your permanent dwelling and dwell in the temporary dwelling,' for these seven days. And in that little hut, in that flimsy home, you will be encouraged to reflect on the temporary nature of your existence in this world, on your actual *tzuras omdo b'olam*... We

should (learn to) always feel that we are not permanent residents any place because the whole *olam hazeh* (this world) is temporary and fleeting...

"And when you know you are not here forever, you will accomplish more, and enjoy much more in Torah and *mitzvos* because you know you are only here for a short time. Because when you know you are here for a little less than 65 million years you think 'maybe I should enjoy my time here with Torah and *mitzvos*, and maybe I should accomplish as much as I can?'" (Toras Avigdor, Succos 5783).

Through the month of Elul, the *Yomim Noraim* and *Aseres Yimei Teshuva*, and through *Chag Ha'Succos*, we have been busy coming closer to Hashem. How do we conclude these exalted days? With the reading of *V'Zos Ha'Bracha* and the death of Moshe *Rabbeinu*. Because even someone as great as Moshe was not here forever.

And this is a message and lesson of the final *pasukim* of the Torah, and this is the message and lesson of *Chag Ha'Succos*. We are mere visitors in Hashem's hotel, and this world is a temporary station in our journey to the *Olam Ha'Emes*. The flimsy *Succah*, where we dwell for seven days, is a *mashal* for our entire lives. No one – not even Moshe – remains in this world forever.

We must use our time – each and every moment – to prepare for our final journey, filling our days, and years, with Torah, *mitzvos*, *chesed* and *maasim tovim*, so that we may merit (*halavay!*) the obituary that Moshe merited: *And there Moshe, the servant of Hashem, died. Chazak chazak v'nis'chazek.*

The ‘Gist’ of the Blessings



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Let’s review the gist of each blessing Moshe gives in Vezot Habracha, one tribe at a time:

REUVEN

At first glance, Moshe Rabbeinu’s opening remarks to the tribe of Reuven appear to be simply a blessing of ‘life’: “Let Reuven live and not die, and let his numbers be counted” (Devarim 33:6).

Nonetheless, both Rashi and Seforno explain how these remarks actually relate to the forthcoming conquest of the land.

Rashi explains how this blessing addresses Moshe’s concern that Reuven would not receive a nachala at all – as he may have lost that right when Yaakov cursed him (on account of his sin with Bilha), just as he forfeited his claim to the ‘bechora.’

Furthermore, the fact that Reuven had already ‘set up camp’ outside the biblical borders of Eretz Canaan provided yet another reason to doubt whether Reuven would truly become an ‘official’ tribe of Israel. Hence, Rashi explains that the purpose of Moshe’s blessing was to counter these fears, thus reassuring Reuven that he will remain ‘alive,’ i.e., a full-fledged member of the tribes of Israel.

In contrast, Chizkuni offers a ‘military’ explanation for this blessing. Considering that the tribe of Reuven had recently promised to ‘take the front line’ in the forthcoming battles to conquer Eretz Canaan, Moshe bestows upon them a blessing of ‘life’ to help them survive this most dangerous task, praying on their behalf that their ‘number’ – population – should remain the same after battle as it was beforehand.

YEHUDA

“Hear, Hashem, the [battle] cry of Yehuda and help him lead his people. Make his hands strong for him, and help him against his enemies” (33:7).

Clearly, the bracha to Yehuda relates to his military leadership, as Moshe foresees that

the soldiers of Yehuda will be particularly enthusiastic and diligent in the conquest of their portion in the Land.

LEVI

“They shall teach Your laws to Yaakov and Your instructions to Israel; they shall offer ktoret... and whole-offerings on the mizbe-ach. G-d should bless his chayil and favor his undertakings. Help him smite the loins of those who rise against him, and don’t allow his enemies to succeed” (33:8-11).

This blessing to Levi focuses on this tribe’s responsibility to provide spiritual leadership, i.e., to teach G-d’s laws and officiate in His Temple. Interestingly, however, even this function is presented in ‘military’ jargon.

Whereas all other tribes earned their “nachala,” a specific, designated portion of land, shevet Levi was scattered among the various tribes in order to serve as teachers throughout the country. Understandably, then, their blessing relates to their leadership role, rather than their allocated portion of the land.

BINYAMIN

“Beloved to G-d, He shall allow His Shchina to dwell securely within him. He constantly protects [=surrounds] him, as He rests between his shoulders” (33:12).

This blessing focuses on the special quality of Binyamin’s nachala, its designation to house the bet ha-mikdash in Yerushalayim.

YOSEF [Efraim & Menashe]

“G-d’s blessing is given to his land, with the bounty of dew from heaven... with the bounty of the earth in its fullness...

His ‘horns’ are like those of a wild ox, with them he gores other nations... these are the ‘tens of thousands’ of Efraim and these are the ‘thousands’ of Menashe” (33:13-17).

The precise translation of this blessing is somewhat elusive, but it clearly speaks of the bountiful nature of the nachala

apportioned to Yosef. It appears that Yosef will bear the responsibility of forming the backbone of Israel’s agrarian economy.

The final verse alludes to Yosef’s military competence that will grant him victory over enemy nations. Specifically, Rashi understands the final pasuk as a reference to the leadership of Yehoshua – a descendant of Efraim – who led Am Yisrael in their conquest of Eretz Canaan.

ZEVULUN & YISSACHAR

“Rejoice Zevulun as you go out [to war] and Yissachar in your tents. [Their prosperity will catalyze] a call to other nations to ascend G-d’s mountain where they will offer proper sacrifices, for they draw from the riches of the sea and from the hidden hoards of the sand” (33:18).

The opening sentence may refer to Zevulun’s military prowess, but the conclusion of the pasuk clearly relates to the importance of his nachala. Their territory was situated along the sea, thus forming Israel’s gateway to foreign trade and, consequently, economic relations with other nations. Moshe anticipates that these business alliances will lead to the recognition on the part of those nations of the G-d of Israel – the primary long-term goal of Am Yisrael.

Furthermore, Rashbam understands the ‘tents’ of Yissachar as a reference to this tribe’s involvement in agriculture, while Rabbenu Yosef Bechor Shor associates Yissachar’s tents with the cattle industry. All this, too, relates directly to Yissachar’s portion: the fertile soil of Emek Yizreel renders it an ideal location for both agriculture and livestock breeding.

GAD

“Blessed be He who enlarges [the nachala of] Gad. He is poised like a lion to tear off arm and scalp [i.e., military strength]. He chose for himself the best [nachala]...”

Once again, Moshe’s bracha focuses on the unique nature of the given tribe’s nachala,

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The Special Protection of Succot



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There is a beautiful *derasha* (homily) said by the Rabbis in interpreting a passage from the daily *Amida* prayer, in which we describe Hashem as “*Melech Ozer U’moshi’a U’magen*” (“King who assists, brings salvation and protects”). These four words, the Rabbis teach, refer to the four significant time-periods of the month of Tishri. The word “*Melech*” (“king”) corresponds to Rosh Hashanah, when we proclaim G-d’s Kingship over the earth. The second word, “*Ozer*” (“assists”), alludes to the *Aseret Yemeh Teshuba* (Ten Days of Repentance), when G-d helps us repent and draw closer to Him. “*Moshi’a*” (“brings salvation”) refers to Yom Kippur, when G-d mercifully cleanses and purifies us from our sins, thus saving us from punishment. Finally, the term “*Magen*” (“protects”) alludes to Succot. On Succot, we leave the comfort and security of our homes, which are equipped with locks and alarm systems, and live in the unstable, unprotected environment of the *Succa*, where

we are exposed to the elements, placing our trust in G-d, confident that He will protect us. As the verse states in Tehillim, “*Ki Yispeneni Be’suko*” – “For He protects me in His *Succa*.” When we leave our homes and enter the *Succa*, we leave the security of our man-made dwellings and enter the security of G-d’s special protection.

We may, however, offer a different explanation for the correspondence between “*Magen*” and Succot. Throughout the period of the *Yamim Nora’im*, we’ve worked on ourselves and ascended to high spiritual levels. With the conclusion of the High Holidays, we need to “protect” and preserve these precious achievements – and this is one of the main purposes of Succot. We celebrate this holiday in order to protect what we’ve gained during the season of repentance, to ensure that we retain our high level of spirituality for at least another week, which will then, hopefully, allow us to retain this level for the next several weeks and months. This is the meaning of “*Magen*” – Succot helps

us protect the great achievements that we’ve made during the period of Rosh Hashanah, the *Aseret Yemeh Teshuba*, and Yom Kippur.

Immediately after Succot, on Shemini Aseret, we begin reciting in the *Amida*, “*Mashib Ha’ru’ah U’morid Ha’geshem*,” which literally means, “He who makes the wind blow and brings down the rain.” One Rabbi, however, quipped that once the holidays of Tishri end, “*Mashib Ha’ru’ah*” – people return the “*Ru’ah*,” the spirituality that they experienced during the holidays, and “*Morid Ha’geshem*” – they bring down the “*Gashmiyut*,” the indulgence in physical and material pursuits. Let us avoid this tendency and see to it that all the hard work we invested during the season of the *Yamim Nora’im* will not be for naught. Let us protect and preserve those accomplishments, so that they will continue to motivate and inspire us to reach even greater levels of spirituality during the weeks and months ahead.

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The Missing Piece



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What is the nature of the simchah, the joy, of Shmini Atzeres? The source of our *simcha* on the other *yomim tovim* is understandable – each Yom Tov has a particular *mitzvah* or specific nature in which we rejoice. We have the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah, the four cups and the Seder on Pesach, the giving of the Torah on Shavuot, and the *lulav, esrog, and sukkah* on Sukkos. Shmini Atzeres is not the anniversary of a particular significant event in our history, nor does it have its own special *mitzvah*. What is the source of our joy on Shmini Atzeres?

The Gemara (Pesachim 71a) teaches that we know it is a *mitzvah* to rejoice on Shmini Atzeres because of the *passuk* related to Sukkos (Devarim 16:15), “And you shall be only happy.” Because the *mitzvah* of *simchah* had already been taught with respect to Sukkos, the Gemara derives from the fact that this *passuk* would otherwise be redundant that it “comes to include the last nights of the Yom Tov for *simchah*.” This derivation is difficult to understand. The Torah uses the word “רק” here in the phrase “only [רק] happy.” We know that anytime the Torah uses this word, it comes to exclude something (see, e.g., Rashi on Vayikra 23:27). Why then does the Torah use a *passuk* with the word “רק – only” to include an additional time of *simchah*, i.e., Shmini Atzeres?

The Gra and other *meforshim* answer this question in various ways but I would like to suggest an additional way. Usually the word “רק – only” comes to exclude something. It implies that something that would normally be present is missing. So when the *passuk* says, “And you shall be only [רק] happy,” it means that we must be happy and rejoice despite the fact that something is missing. As we stand before *Yizkor*, we are cognizant of the fact that



Our tefilos on Shmini Atzeres and during the hakafos, the dancing, on Simchas Torah have tremendous power.

many people struggle to find a way to rejoice on Shmini Atzeres and Simchas Torah despite the fact that they feel they are missing something. They have lost people without whom they will never feel completely whole. Yet the Torah tells each person to somehow, despite those whom he is missing, find a way to rejoice on Shmini Atzeres and Simchas Torah.

After we offer *korbanos* for the benefit of the nations of the world throughout Sukkos, Hashem invites us to a private little celebration, just Him and us, saying, “It is difficult for Me to separate from you” (Rashi on Bamidbar 29:35). Perhaps because of our intimate relationship with Hashem right now, we can tell Hashem, “It may be difficult for You to separate from us. But it is also difficult for us to separate from our brothers and sisters!” We cannot bear the separation caused by the iron curtain cutting us off from those who have been taken to the next world while they were so young. Our *tefilos* on Shmini Atzeres and during the *hakafos*, the dancing, on Simchas Torah have tremendous power. Let us tell Hashem, “It is too difficult for us to separate from other Jews! Let no more be taken away!”

We have a tradition that Shmini Atzeres is a special time of closeness with G-d. This can be compared to two close friends who were separated from one another for

a long time because they live in different cities. One day, they find out they are able to reunite because of business they have with each other. When they reunite, they take care of the business that needs to be done in order to get it out of the way. When they finished, they are able to simply enjoy each other’s company. That is Shmini Atzeres. In a certain way, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkos – matters of atonement and the related follow-up – are the business arrangements Hashem and the Jewish people have to “get out of the way” to free us up to focus purely on enjoying one another’s company on Shmini Atzeres.

May Hashem answer our *tefilos* so that we can put the need to say goodbye to our Jewish brothers and sisters behind us as we dine in a little feast on the big *levyasan* with Hashem and Moshiach, with the coming of the complete redemption, may it come soon in our days!

A Torah of Flesh and Blood



Rabbi YY Jacobson
TheYeshiva.net

On August 26, 1827, Tsar Nicholas published the Recruitment Decree calling for conscription of Jewish boys between the ages of twelve and twenty-five into the Russian army. As discussed 2 weeks ago, these boys were known as Cantonists; derived from the term ‘Canton’ referring to the ‘districts’ they were sent, and the ‘bar-racks’ in which they were kept. Conscripts under the age of eighteen were assigned to live in preparatory institutions until they were old enough to formally join the army. The twenty-five years of service required that these recruits be counted from age eighteen, even if they had already spent many years in military institutions before reaching that age.

Nicholas strengthened the Cantonist system and used it to single out Jewish children for persecution, their baptism being of a high priority to him. No other group or minority in Russia was expected to serve at such a young age, nor were other groups of recruits tormented in the same way. Nicholas wrote in a confidential memorandum, “The chief benefit to be derived from the drafting of the Jews is the certainty that it will move them most effectively to change their religion.”

During the reign of Nicholas I, approximately seventy thousand Jews, some fifty thousand who were children, were taken by force from their homes and families and inducted into the Russian army. The boys, raised in the traditional world of the Shtetle, were pressured through every possible means, including torture, to accept baptism. Many resisted and some managed to maintain their Jewish identity. The magnitude of their struggle is difficult to conceive.

This thirty year period from 1827 till 1856 saw the Jewish community in an unrelieved state of panic. Parents lived

in perpetual fear that their children would be the next to fill the Tsar’s quota. A child could be snatched from any place at any time. Every moment might be the last together; when a child left for *cheder* (school) in the morning, parents did not know if they would ever see him again. When they retired at night after singing him to sleep, they never knew whether they would have to struggle with the *chappers* (kidnapper, *chap* is the Yiddish term for grab) during the night in a last ditch effort to hold onto their son.

These kids were beaten and lashed, often with whips fashioned from their own confiscated tefillin (phylacteries). In their malnourished states, the open wounds on their chests and backs would turn septic and many boys, who had heroically resisted renouncing their Judaism for months, would either perish or cave in and consent to the show of baptism. As kosher food was unavailable, they were faced with the choice of either abandoning Jewish dietary laws or starvation. To avoid this horrific fate, some parents actually had their sons’ limbs amputated in the forests at the hands of local blacksmiths, and their sons—no longer able bodied—would avoid conscription. Other children committed suicide rather than convert.

All cantonists were institutionally underfed, and encouraged to steal food from the local population, in emulation of the Spartan character building.

The brave few survivors who maintained their faith and managed to return to their families 25 years later, found it hard to integrate into the regular community. They were illiterate, uneducated, and had lived among Russian gentiles for a quarter century. So they built their own shuls (synagogues) in order to do things in

their own way. These came to be known as the Cantonist Shuls.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Milstein related the following story which he heard from a Jew who heard it from his grandfather.

This man’s grandfather once attended a Cantonist Shul on Simchat Torah, the joyous holiday when we dance with Torah scrolls in the synagogue. Now the cantonists could dance like Cossacks. They were tall, strong, muscular men, and the heavy Torah scrolls would seem like toothpicks in their arms. They effortlessly danced on for hours on end. Many Jews from different synagogues came to see them dance. Truth be told, some of these Jews sadly and foolishly looked down at these soldiers. They looked like Cossacks, and were crass and uncultured. It was not their fault, they had no education, they grew up without family or community; they were drafted into a hostile army at such a young age. But people are often judgmental: “he is just not my type...”

Then for the final *hakafah* (circuit around the synagogue’s central lectern), the cantonists, as if on cue, suddenly in unison removed their shirts from their bodies. With the Torahs held tightly to their bare skin which was covered with the most horrible welts and scars, they danced around even more energetically. Their smiles and joy were now giving way to streams of tears flowing from the cheeks of the learned and educated Jews who came to watch them dance.

The learned Jews were now filled with deep shame. They were all thinking the same thoughts: We may have studied and observed this Torah, but these holy Jews gave their bodies and lives for it. We are holding the Torah scrolls; but their bodies are Torah scrolls. For them, Torah and their bare skin have become one. Theirs was not a Torah of sermons and words;

Continued on next page

“She is a Tree of Life to Those who Grasp Her”



Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
Popular Torah teacher and author

The climax of the Sukkot festival is Simchat Torah, and we have no idea how powerful the prayers are when dancing with the Torah scrolls. This is the dance of the righteous that awaits us in heaven. It is so powerful that Rabbi Pincus, *zt'l*, says that anyone who is in the synagogue with the Torah scrolls during “Hakafot” can ask for two things: Simcha for the whole year and Torah in the house for the whole year.

And see a wonderful interpretation by the Eish Kodesh, the Rabbi of Piaszna, about the special connection between the Torah and women: According to the Eish Kodesh, a man passes on the obligation to study Torah to his son. Thus, when a father sits down to learn and says to his son, “Come to me and learn with me,” he passes on the sense of obligation to him; men are obligated to study Torah. On the other hand, when a woman who is exempt from Torah study takes it up, she does so not

from the power of the commandment, but from the power of love. Therefore, the woman plays a major role in Simchat Torah, for it is she who passes on the love of Torah to her sons and daughters. The joy (*simcha*) of Torah is its love, and that is to err in it, even if no one forces you to do so. So you are the one who instills the love of Torah and the desire for Torah that is greater than that of those who have to sit down and learn because they have to.

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Gad’s initiative to widen his inheritance in Transjordan, as well as their military capabilities.

DAN

“Dan is like a lion’s whelp that leaps from the Bashan.”

Dan’s blessing obviously relates to their military might and the location of their nachala – at the western slopes of the Golan Heights, today the area of Tel Dan and Kiryat Shmona in the Chula valley of the Upper Galil. Anyone who has been on a tiul to the Golan, and visited the old Syrian bunkers that overlooked the Chula valley and the area of Tel Dan and Kiryat Shmona, can easily understand how the phrase ‘yezaneq min ha-Bashan’ describes the nachala of Dan.

Additionally, Rashi explains the lion metaphor as a reference to Dan’s location on the border, standing guard against enemy intrusion.

NAFTALI

“Naftali should be satiated [for his nachala] is full of G-d’s blessing to the west and south (of his brother Dan) he shall/must conquer his land” (33:23).

Again, Moshe’s bracha relates to the agricultural potential of this nachala and the conquest of that portion.

ASHER

“May Asher be the most blessed of sons, may he be the favorite of his brothers and may he dip his foot in oil. Iron and copper are your door-bolts, and your security should last for all your days” (33:24).

These psukim require further elucidation, but what is clear is that they relate to two unique characteristics of Asher’s nachala: its abundance of olive trees (and hence olive oil) and its location on Israel’s northern border.

SUMMARY

As we review all these brachot, it becomes clear that they all focus on the nature of each nachala and the conquest of the land.

These observations can help us understand the underlying intention of the blessings that Moshe Rabbeinu bestows at this time. Aware of the military capabilities of each tribe and the anticipated geographic division of the land (note 34:1-4), Moshe blesses each tribe – encouraging them to achieve their fullest potential in the forthcoming conquest of Eretz Canaan.

Continued from previous page

it was a Torah of life, of self sacrifice, of absolute and unwavering commitment.

Living today in freedom, few of us have been beaten for our Judaism. Yet as we will once again this year hold on to the

sacred scrolls and dance with the Torah, we ought to ask ourselves how we can make the Torah part of our own flesh, allowing its words be transcribed on the tablets of our hearts, not just on the

parchment of our synagogues. For this is the Torah that really matters—the one that ignites a fire in our souls.

Hebrew Language in the Parsha



David Curwin

balashon.com

Author of the book *Kohelet: A Map to Eden* (Maggid)

After Sukkot comes שמיני עצרת Shemini Atzeret. We find the term first in Numbers 29:35: ביום השמיני-עצרת, תהיה לכם "On the eighth day, you will have an atzeret."

Similarly we find it mentioned in Leviticus 23:36:

ביום השמיני מקרא-קדש יהיה לכם ... עצרת הוא-- כל-מלאכת עבודה, לא תעשו

"On the eighth day you shall observe a sacred occasion ... it is an atzeret; you shall not work at your occupations."

The last day of Pesach is called atzeret in Deuteronomy 16:8: ועצרת, ועצרת, "On the seventh day, an atzeret."

Additionally, in Rabbinic Hebrew, the holiday of Shavuot is known as *Atzeret*.

What is *atzeret*? There are several opinions:

a) Assembly, gathering: In Isaiah 1:13, we find the word *atzara* עצרה which has this

meaning. Onkelos translates the word as כניש - gathering, which is related to the word הכנסת בית - Beit HaKnesset, literally "house of gathering."

b) Stoppage of work: The Gemara gives this explanation in Chagiga 9a and 18a: עצרת עצור מעשיית מלאכה - "atzeret - stop doing work." This is the opinion of Ibn Ezra and Sforno.

c) Delay: This is Rashi's explanation, based on the Midrash in which G-d asks us to stay with Him just one day more. Radak in Sefer HaShorashim takes a similar approach and says that those that went up to Jerusalem for Sukkot were delayed there for one more day. Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffman writes that while the previous meanings are found in other books of the Bible, in the Torah עצר only means "to delay, to restrain." The modern Hebrew verb לעצור - "to arrest, to detain" is related to this meaning.

d) Conclusion: This is how the Septuagint

translates the word into Greek: exodion, meaning "finale" (and related to the word "exodus.") Bula in Da'at Mikra Vayikra says this meaning applies well to the last day of Pesach and Shavuot, which concludes the period of the Omer.

The different meanings of *atzeret* can help us understand a difference in the text of the *Ya'aleh VeYavo* prayer. When mentioning Shemini Atzeret, *Nusach Ashkenaz* says: ביום השמיני חג העצרת הזה, while *Nusach Sefard* has: ביום השמיני העצרת החג הזה.

The *Nusach Ashkenaz* version refers to the *chag* of *atzeret*, a holiday on its own, which fits with the definitions of "assembly" or "stoppage of work."

The *Nusach Sefard* version has "the *atzeret* of the *chag*," where *chag* refers to Sukkot. Therefore, the *atzeret* mentioned would be either the conclusion of Sukkot or one additional day's delay after the seven days of Sukkot.

Parsha Riddle



Reb Leor Broh

Mizrachi Melbourne

What name is given to the month of Tishrei in Sefer Malachim, and why?

Answer to the Parsha Riddle

2) The Avot were born during Tishrei and they are called "Eitanim" - "mighty," because the whole world exists in their merit.
1) Tishrei is a month filled with Mitzvot, which gives us merit and strength.
In the Gemara (Rosh Hashana 11a) we find two explanations for this:
"Yerach HaEitanim" - "the month of the mighty" (Malachim 1, 8:2).



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