

This Week in Torah *Ha'azinu*

Sukkot is coming! O the celebrations that we are going to have—time to sit in the sukkah, a chance to invite friends/families to share a meal as if they are one of the *Ushpazim* [the traditional guests who are invited in], and a chance to stand in awe. Sukkot is a wonderful holiday, full of joy. What it is now is an evolution of what it once was when the Jewish commonwealth was in existence until the year 70CE. In the Talmud, the rabbis record what occurred in Jerusalem when the Temple stood. They spoke of it as *HaChag*—THE holiday, one of the 3 pilgrimage festivals recorded in the Torah. They speak of the various elements of the celebration from large candelabras that hung in courtyards, bands playing Psalms to inspire people as they ascended to the Temple, children of priests sitting on tall ladders and pouring colored water as if they were part of fountains. It was joyous, that is for sure.

Remember that in the land of Israel, Sukkot also marks the start of the rainy season. Rain is essential for the land of Israel. Unlike the Tigris and Euphrates River that make up the Fertile Crescent in Mesopotamia and the Nile in Egypt, Israel's rivers do not produce the water to sustain the people. That comes in the form of rain which needs to be collected in reservoirs and cisterns.

The rainy season has 3 distinct parts. Now until the end of *Kislev* [which is similar to the end of our secular calendar year], it is a light rain. The Heavy rain starts in January and runs thru February/March. The later rains are March until Passover. In our prayer books, it is marked by a simple change in our liturgy—in *Gevurot* part of the *Amidah*, we switch from praying for dew to asking God for rain. We change back to the request for dew after Passover.

Keep that in mind as you read *Ha'azinu*. The opening verses use water as a metaphor: “Give ear, O heavens, let me speak; Let the earth hear the words I utter! May my discourse come down as the rain, My speech distill as the dew, like showers on young growth, like droplets on the grass.” Awash in water imagery, Moses likens his own teaching to varieties of precipitation—rain, dew, showers, and droplets. He prays that his words fall and flow and gently envelop his followers. The 19th century, Chasidic sage known as the Sefat Emet sees in this a grand metaphor for human awakening. We

(*adam*) are all like the earth (*adamah*), he says, full of potential growth and infinite possibilities. We just need some form of rain to activate us, to help us bring forth our fruit. Deep within us all lies a “*nekudah chiyut*, a point of vitality”--a spark of life, divinity, power. We just need something to “water” us in order to stimulate the expression or actualization of this latent force.

What is YOUR “*nekudah chiyut*, point of vitality”? That is a sentiment we need to discover as we prepare for Sukkot. Is it embracing the beauty of God’s natural world as you stand in awe as the leaves change color? Is it the wisdom gleaned from an understanding of words of Torah? Is it the majesty of living that are echoes thru the words of poetry or art? Is it found for you in the simple silence as you pause to see the blessings of family and friends? There are so many potential opportunities!

Ha’azinu! Give heed to them as if we are the fertile soil into which the seeds of eternal life are planted.