

## Humility & HaAzinu

Torah describes Moses as *anav meod*, 'exceedingly humble.' This week we read Moses's final words. As Deuteronomy comes to a close soon, God tells Moses to record his own death – "*va'yamot sham Moshe eved Hashem...*" and *Moses, God's servant, died there.*" Rabbi Meir tells us that Moses wrote those words in tears. A later source, the *Tiferet Shlomo*, explains that "Moses didn't cry because he had to write of his own passing. He cried because he had to praise himself for all eternity as the 'servant of God.' "That is true humility – true *anavut*."

Perhaps that's why we read of Moses passing this time of year. We prepare for his passing just before Sukkot and we read the final words of Torah following Sukkot. Sukkot teaches us humility.

I want to teach you two very important words – *Tayku* and *anavut*. *Tayku* is an Aramaic term that means "let it stand." And *anavut* is the Hebrew word for humility.

As I listen to the news here at home and in Israel, I realize that, in our contemporary culture, we have neither. Everyone knows everything about everything. From Supreme Court Nominees to the deal with Iran to the midterms and asylum seekers in the U.S. and Israel, rest assured we all know everything, and I'm right and you're wrong.

Here's what I am absolutely sure of: I don't know. I don't know if the smart people I choose to agree with know more than the smart people whose views I dislike.

I don't know, and neither does anybody else.

Why was Man created last, just before Shabbat? "*Sh'im tazuch da'ato alav, omer lo yatush kadm'cha b'ma'aseh bereishit.*" So that should he become arrogant, he's reminded that even the mosquito was created before him" (Sanhedrin 38a). So what's the problem? Why has the discourse (in the U.S. and Israel) been so extreme and even painful at times? How is it that Jews can accuse fellow Jews with whom they disagree of having 'blood on their hands?' Why have leaders called

those on the left ‘capos,’ while those on the right are labeled racists and warmongers?

When Jews are calling each other capos, nazi-collaborators, we’ve really lost it. The American Jewish community has disgusting rhetoric around Israel. The Israelis are no better.

When arrogance rules the day, civility is the casualty. The possibility that we could be wrong honors our imperfections and failures. It treats others with kindness and grace, even when we think they’re wrong.

As my Baltimore colleague, Rabbi Daniel Cotzin Burg reminded me: ‘Civility is akin to humility’<sup>1</sup> – a quality clearly lacking in our current President, the current Israeli Prime Minister, countless elected officials and news personalities, and many others.

The sukkah is a symbol of humility – simple, organic, vulnerable. In the sukkah, we are open to the elements and we are under the stars. As we look up, we see the ultimate reminder that we are but a tiny speck in this vast universe. As human beings, we think we’re powerful and brilliant. Sukkot reminds us that we are not the center of the universe. On Sukkot, we learn to depend on God – not ourselves, not other people – God alone.

Rav Kook taught: “*Anavah* is associated with spiritual perfection. When humility effects depression, it is defective; when it is genuine it inspires joy, courage and inner dignity.”

And that is why Sukkot is *z’man simchateinu*, the season of our rejoicing. Wishing you all a joyous season! *Moadim l’simcha!*

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Tayku’ Vahodesh Shofar: The Civility of ‘Let It Stand,’ Rosh HaShanah I, 5776 – 9.14.15, Rabbi Daniel Cotzin Burg, Beth Am Synagogue.