



# A Tishrei Companion



# Rabbi Levi Langer



## Rosh Hashana and the Celestial Computers

King Achashverosh -- so we are told in the Megillah -- acceded to his queen Esther's plea that the Jews be allowed to turn the table on the wicked Haman. Seventy days later, on the twenty-third of Sivan, he sent out messengers with a new directive reversing his earlier order: the Jewish people were to protect themselves and to destroy any enemy who would rise against them.

Esther made her request on 16 Nissan, and Achashveirosh agreed, yet it took seventy days for Achashveirosh to send out the new messengers on 23 Sivan. During those seventy days, writes R. Elliah, the Vilna Gaon, the Jews gathered together and cried to Hashem, and they underwent a profound teshuvah with all their hearts.

In fact, Achashverosh had already made his decision. But the Jews knew nothing of this. As far as they could tell nothing had changed, and they were all shortly to meet their death. So they gathered, and they cried. But all the while, in a manner hidden from them the Almighty had already come through, and Achashverosh had already reversed his evil decree.

On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur

we cry to Hashem, we do teshuva, we go through a profound repentance, and we beseech Hashem for a good year. We ask Him to remove all the hardships and the difficulties. And then we wake up the day after Yom Kippur and it often seems nothing has changed: the obstacles in our lives; the same struggles. It seems that we achieved nothing.

But all the while, up in Heaven the angels have been sitting at the celestial computers, typing commands busily on their keyboards and writing code for all the many blessings that the Almighty has already decided to bestow upon us. We don't see it yet, but the world is already a changed world, and our lives are already changed, because of the full-hearted teshuvah process we've undergone.

Life has been tough lately. We've been going through a pandemic, and a recession, and it doesn't look like things are going to turn around suddenly. But up in Heaven the Almighty has got everything prepared for a new year of bounty and blessing. He's ready -- but are we?

That's the question we have to ask ourselves on Rosh Hashanah. Hashem

is ready to give, but are we ready to transform ourselves into people who are able to receive? Are we prepared to dedicate ourselves to living in accordance with the Divine spark within ourselves, and to help make the

world a place that the Almighty would want to reside in?

If we do that, then Hashem's blessings will come. He's ready. It's up to us.

## Rabbi Doniel Schon



### Rosh Hashana: The Power to Recreate

Rav Nosson Wachtfogel zt”l, the *mashgiach* in the Lakewood Yeshiva, was once asked what one should do if he feels a sense of despair in the days leading up to Rosh Hashana. Presumably the questioner felt that he had not been living a proper Jewish life, and was therefore concerned about the upcoming day of judgement. Rav Wachtfogel responded “how can one have a sense of despair when we know that one is judged only as he is at the present time of Rosh Hashana?”

The concept of being judged based on one’s present state is first demonstrated in the Chumash when HaShem saves Yishmael from dying from thirst. Rashi, comments on Bereishis 21:17, paraphrasing a gemara in Rosh Hashana (16b) which records a discussion between the angels and Hashem. The angels complained to HaShem, arguing how can You save Yishmael from thirst,

when You know that in the future his descendants will kill Your children through thirst? Hashem responded, “Right now, is he righteous or evil”? Since in fact Yishmael was righteous at that moment, HaShem judged him favorably and caused a miracle to occur and water appeared out of nowhere. This story is the source that HaShem judges a person only on his present state, and this is one of the reasons why it is read as the Torah portion for Rosh Hashana.

Rav Wachtfogel explained that with every sin there are two components – the sin itself and the person who has committed the sin. On Rosh Hashana the judgement is not about the sin itself, rather it is about the person. While prior sins do influence the spiritual nature of a person, on Rosh Hashana a person can break free from the shackles of those sins and rededicate himself or herself to Hashem.

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The gemara in Sanhedrin states *hakol holeich achar harosh* – everything goes after its beginning. The way we live the first few days of the year will have a profound influence on the rest of the year. Rabbi Akiva Tatz explains that we see this as well in the physical world: the beginning period of any entity has a lasting effect on it. For example, if an adult would suffer a small injury it may not cause significant damage, while if a fetus in its developmental state would sustain that same injury the consequences would be dire. Similarly, a hairline crack in a building's foundation will cause much more damage than a hairline crack on its thirtieth floor.

The constant refrain throughout the Rosh Hashana davening is on coronating Hashem as king over the universe, as well as over each of us individually. The *avodah*, the specific spiritual task, of Rosh Hashana is not focused on an individual's sin. In fact, there is hardly any mention of sin on Rosh Hashana – that is reserved for Yom Kippur. Rather the *avodah* of Rosh Hashana is to bring HaShem back into our life in a more real way. We accomplish this by spending the day davening and reinforcing within ourselves the concepts of *malchiyos*- HaShem's rule over the world, *zichronos*- HaShem's remembering all of our deeds, and *shofros*- which remind us of HaShem's direct involvement in the world as seen at the giving of the Torah, and will hopefully be witnessed soon again with the

coming of Moshiach. Hopefully, if we can rededicate ourselves to HaShem, then in the upcoming year HaShem will provide us with everything we need to serve Him properly.

Along these lines, Rabbi Chaim Friedlander comments that the judgment on Rosh Hashana is not similar to the way an earthly court looks at a person's actions in order to hold him accountable and determine his reward or punishment. Instead, it is a judgment of the person assessing the person's level specifically on Rosh Hashana. The judgement of Rosh Hashana is similar to a CEO of a company allocating resources for a budget for the upcoming year. While the CEO will look at an employee's past performance, the CEO will also look at where the employee currently stands with his potential for growth. Even if a certain employee has not had the most favorable results in the past year, if he is on an upward trajectory, he may be awarded more resources than an employee with a better track record who is on a downward trajectory. On Rosh Hashana aim to be on an upward spiritual trajectory.

Accordingly, Hashem determines what the person standing before Him today needs to receive in the coming year to faithfully fulfill his or her mission.

# Rabbi Shimon Silver



## Rabbi Akiva Eger zt"l's takanos for Yamim Noraim during the cholera epidemic of 1831

My Great great-great-grandfather Rabbi Akiva Eger zt"l (1<sup>st</sup> of Cheshvan 5522/1761 – 13<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei 5598/1837) is best known nowadays as one of the greatest Talmudists of the last few hundred years. In his capacity as Oberlandsrabbiner, chief rabbi of the Grand Duchy of Posen in East Prussia, he was also known in his times for his charity and communal organization. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of July 1831 the local authorities announced that the deadly cholera plague that was sweeping across Europe had struck the city of Posen. R Akiva Eger established and guided a commission which laid down regulations. Enforcing them would strengthen the community's resistance to the epidemic. As a result of his efforts, the government commission reported a relatively low mortality rate in Posen (as of September 5<sup>th</sup> 1831, 24 members of the Jewish community out of a total of 416 deaths in Posen) and attributed it to the 'venerable old chief rabbi'. Along with caring for the sick, one of his main goals was to ensure that those who fell ill would not conceal the fact, and thus risk spreading it. R Akiva Eger received royal recognition for his work in a Kabinet-Schreiben

recommendation signed by King Frederick William III of Prussia. The document, sealed with the royal seal and dated 5<sup>th</sup> of September 1831 in Berlin, was presented to the Rav by Oberpraesident Flottwell during a Shabbos service. Though R Akiva Eger could not open it on Shabbos, the Oberpraesident did so himself, and read it aloud in shul.

Despite the commendation given on September 5<sup>th</sup>, the plague ran from Av 5591 though Rosh Chodesh Av 5592, including the Yamim Noraim 5592, and Rabbi Akiva Eger and his Bais Din, the local Rabbinical Council, established protocols for the services. The document was published in German with certain words in the original Hebrew. The words for Bais Kenesess, or shul, and for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur always appear in Hebrew. Other words also appear in Hebrew for emphasis. It is found in the sefer *פסקים והקנות רבי עקיבא איגר* (גיטן) published in Hebrew translation by Rabbi Nosson Gestetner zt"l (5692-5771, 1932-2010) a famous descendant of R Akiva Eger (Jerusalem 5731). In the Hebrew translation, the words originally in Hebrew are bold. It is

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chapter 20 of the section on Hanhagos Vetakanos, and we will present an English translation with most of the original Hebrew insertions translated and bold. The halachically important Hebrew insertions will be included and translated. Occasionally, I will add an editorial note in parentheses and in a smaller typeface.

## **Regulations and warnings at the outbreak of the cholera epidemic**

### **The general rules of conduct for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Hakipurim for year 5592/1831**

#### **For Khal Adath Yeshurun, Here in Posen**

The committee signed below with **our great esteemed master the Av Beth Din (Chief Rabbi) at its head** together with the **rabbis of the Beth Din (rabbinical court), may G-d protect them**, has been deliberating on rules of conduct **on the two days of Rosh Hashanah and on Yom Kippur this year**. We have taken into consideration that, according to the doctors, large gatherings of men **in shuls** for hours, leaving home on an empty stomach, and breathing the nippy morning air, risk contributing to catching cholera. In addition, lighting with lamps of oil and tallow is very harmful to health. [These regulations] are herewith set forth:

1. In all **shuls** both **in the men's**

**section and in the women's section on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur** only half of the seats may be occupied, using the following model: Every seat will have an empty seat next to it. Only half of the seat-holders in the shuls will be able to attend **the shuls on these holy days**. All seat holders have equal **rights, and who may lose his rights to whom else?** Therefore, one half may occupy their seats **in shuls on the two days of Rosh Hashanah and the other half on Yom Kippur by night and day.**

2. In order to reach the objective of ensuring that every second seat is vacant, and to determine who will get their seat on **Rosh Hashanah** and who on **Yom Kippur**, the **Gaon Av Bais Din**, (the Chief Rabbi, or senior member of the local Rabbinical Council, in this case, R Akiva Eger himself) cast a lottery, as all the seats **in the shuls** are numbered in order as multiples of 1 or 2 (odd or even numbered) **and the lot fell** on the number 1. For **Rosh Hashanah** the seats with odd numbers will be occupied and for **Yom Kippur**, the even numbers. By way of the lottery it turns out that seat-holders whose numbers are odd will occupy their seats **on Rosh Hashanah** and those whose seat numbers are even will leave their seats vacant. The opposite [will occur] **on Yom Kippur** – seat-holders whose seat numbers are

even will occupy their seats while the odd numbered seats will not be occupied.

3. **The Gaon Av Beis Din (R Akiva Eger, chief Rabbi), may his light shine, the permanent Dayanim, the Gabbai (officer) of the month, the person appointed Segan (the gabbai who calls out aliyos) for the year according to our minhag here, and also the Baalei Tefilos, leaders of the services on their day, and also in the women's section, the Rebitzen, may she live long, and the gabba'iss (women officers) of every shul – will keep their seats both on Rosh Hashanah and on Yom Kippur even though according to the lottery they would have needed to give them up.**
4. **The head officers (Members of the Board) should take care of the printing of tickets in a unique way for each shul. The odd numbered seat-holders can pick up their tickets on the Tuesday before Rosh Hashanah for use on Rosh Hashanah, and seat-holders with even numbered seats can pick up their tickets up for Yom Kippur on Thursday before Yom Kippur.**
5. To maintain order an army guard will be seated at every entrance to a shul, people will be expected to show him the tickets, and special police officers will also be responsible to maintain this

arrangement in the shuls.

6. As those who will not be permitted entry to shuls will need to make Minyanim in private homes, those running each minyan are required to be specially vigilant that the number of participants relative to the space will also be limited in the same fashion, such that only half of the seats that are set up there will be occupied, and that supervision will be enforced to observe this ruling through the health authorities.
7. The executive board members will help as much as they can to set up the minyanim and to provide them with sifrei Torah and Shofars, as needed.
8. By order of our Master and Teacher the Chief Rabbi, may his light shine, a public sale of the "Mitzvos" (aliyos and kibudim) should be made at all the minyanim and the monies shall be consecrated to the communal charity coffers.
9. On Rosh Hashanah, the services from Yigdal until after the shofar blasts at the end of Musaf should take no longer than five hours. The shuls should open at 5, at 5:30 they shall begin with Yigdal and at 10:30 all the tefilos and shofar blasts should end. To this end:
  - a) The "Mitzvos" will be sold the evening before, after Maariv;
  - b) anyone who has an aliya may make just one "Mi Shebairach";

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- c) The **Piyutim** (additional) liturgical poems before **Kedusha** at **Shacharis** [on the first day of RH] from **מן מלך במשפט וכו' וביום השני** (and on the second day) **מן אשר מי יעשה וכו'** (the poems beginning with those words and everything between them) and also **הפיוטים שבין מלכויות זכרונותם וכו'** **ושופרות למוספים, אנסיכת ואלהלה וכו'** the poems for Musaf between the middle brochos shall not be said at all; d) The leaders of the services may not draw out the services at all with songs and chazanus, they should only say the tefilos word for word and give them meaning with feeling and *kavanah*.
10. On Rosh Hashanah it is forbidden to light up the shuls before noon. Only in front of the *amud* of the chazan they may kindle some lights.
11. The Chief rabbi and Bais Din announce [their ruling] that no-one is **פ' יוצא על פ' דין – fulfills his obligation halachically**, if he comes to shul on Rosh Hashanah with an empty stomach. Everyone is **obligated** to eat something warm in the morning. Even if it is already day (after dawn when one should not eat before davening) he is obligated at the very least to drink tea.
12. The Chief Rabbi and the Bais Din rule that anyone feeling any minor weakness is **obliged immediately after blowing** **shofar** to go to his home and to eat breakfast by reciting **kiddush where he will be eating a meal**. Although this is an interruption between the first blasts and the second blasts during Musaf. For right after Shacharis the obligation to recite kiddush takes effect and this is not possible to do unless it is **where there will be a meal**. However, before blowing the shofar, only **טעימה בעלמא מותר** a small snack is permitted. Therefore, only with great difficulty is it possible to make **קידוש במקומות סעודה קודם תקיעת שופר** kiddush with its meal before blowing shofar. However, so that nobody should be late for the silent Musaf prayer, they shall wait about a half hour before beginning Musaf in every shul. (R Gestetner felt that this clause contains many halachic details. He transliterated the original German in a footnote to prevent misunderstandings. He also added a detailed and extensive discussion of the issues. While we will not do that here, please understand that this deals with a halachic controversy and this should not be taken as a conclusive ruling.)
13. On Yom Kippur night, the **תפילות שמועות תפילת שמועה** should not be said with the tune and passuk by passuk as is the usual custom (in Posen; this is not our custom). Rather, the congregation and the chazan should say it together without the tune, and the **piyyut אותן עד רישן** (which most shuls omit nowadays) should not be said at all. At 10 (PM) all shuls must

close. Everyone is **absolutely obligated** to rest **at night in his own home**. (It is not unusual for people to spend the night awake in shul.)

14. **On the morning of Yom Kippur, the shuls will open at 4:30, at the time that the army changes guard.** At 5:45 [services] will begin with **Yigdal**. **Selichos** will not be said at all, not at **Shacharis** and not at **Musaf** and not at **Mincha**. They will say only **כִּי עַל רְחָמֵיךְ** and one time **the Thirteen Attributes [of Mercy]** and right after that **זְכוֹר רְחָמֵיךְ**. **At Shacharis on Yom Kippur** right after **על מכוון והיכלך** they will begin “**כִּי עַל רְחָמֵיךְ פִוִיטִים**” (R Gestetner points out that this is not to be taken literally. Some of the prayers between these are essential.)

15. **The cantor for Shacharis is obligated to shorten the chazanus and songs so Shacharis, Krias Hatorah and Yizkor will end by 10:30. The cantor for Musaf shall not begin before 11:30. In between one can say Tehilim, and whoever wants can rest for the entire hour in his home. The cantor for Musaf is obligated to finish by 3. The cantor for Mincha should stand up [to begin] services only at 4:15. In between they shall do the same as between Shacharis and Musaf.**

16. For lighting in **shuls on Yom Kippur**, oil lamps, tallow, or yellow wax shall not be used. Therefore, no-one has permission to bring them **to shul**. Rather, all

**the householders** are asked to donate the cost of the wax candles or lamps that they have been bringing **to shul in past years – to the communal charity coffers**. **The Members of the Board** will light the **shuls** with white wax candles that will burn until 10 **at night**. But **by day** wax candles will be lit only before the **amud and at the seat of the Chief Rabbi from Kol Nidrei until after Neilah**. Apart from these, no lamps will burn throughout the day **until before Neilah**. At that point the lights will be kindled **by a non-Jew** **ואף שעוד עתה נהוג פה למןוע מזה שידליק נכרי לצורך ישראל ביום כפורים, והנרות אשר הובאו בעבר יום כפורים לבית הכנסת היו דולקים מערב יום כפורים עד סוף נעילה, ואך לפה העת שצעריך הרחקה מכל מיחוש וחשש בעולם. להה פסק הגאב"ד וביד"ץ בשעת הדחק טוב לסמוק על הפוסקים המתירים הדלקה על ידי נכרי בשבייל ישראל לצורך מצוה ותפלילת נעילה.** Although until now the practice in this community is to refrain from having a non-Jew kindle for a Jew on YK, and the lights brought to shul are left burning from Erev YK until the end of Neilah, but at this time we need to distance any risks or concerns that exist. Therefore, the Chief Rabbi rules that in pressing circumstances we rely on the halachic authorities who permit kindling by a non-Jew for a Jew to facilitate a mitzvah and Tefilas Neilah.

17. **Yom Kippur is a Scriptural**

**obligation.** Therefore, the Chief Rabbi and his court are unable to rule leniently in a general sense regarding the fast. However, so that every single person has the opportunity to consult with a doctor for guidance immediately when feeling weakness or diarrhea G-d forbid, there will be two doctors available all day in the congregational room serving as a central location in every shul in town. The Chief Rabbi has warned about this with a severe warning: Do not keep secret even the most minor event even a tiny bit secret, but ask the doctor immediately. והעובר על זה הרי הוא מתחייב בנפשו, ולא בנפשו בלבד כי יכול להיות תקלת על ידו ח"ו לנפשות אחרות, וסופו ליתן דין על נפשו ועל נפשות אחרות, ונוסף לו זה ביום הקדוש ונורא הזה שיזהר בעצמו מההעבירה הגדולה הזאת שהיא בכל שפיכות דמים ביום הקדוש חיללה. One who violates this is responsible for his own life, and not only for his own life for it is possible that through his actions something bad can happen to others G-d forbid. He will eventually have to give an accounting for his life and for other lives. On top of this, on this holy and awesome day he must guard himself from committing this great transgression that is considered shedding blood on this holy day, Heaven forfend, Heaven forfend.

## The Cholera Commission of Those who Follow the Law of Moses

בתוך הדברים הנ"ל יש איזה פרטיהם הנוגעים לדינא, מהו אשר הסכימו עמי כבוד ידיי הרבניים המאווה"ג בית דין הצדקה דפה, ובאו בעצמם על החתום

הק' עקיבא במ"ה משה גינז ז"ל

הק' מרדכי לאנדסבורג

הק' יעקב קאלפראי

הק' שמואל בן מו"ה לאוזי זצ"ל פ"ד

Included in the above words are certain details that relate to halachic rulings; my esteemed colleagues the rabbis, lights of the exile, the rabbinical court of this town agreed with me on them, and they themselves signed:

(The small) Akiva son of Moraeinu Harav Moshe Ginz z"l

(The small) Mordechai Landsberg

(The small) Yaakov Kalvari

(The small) Shmuel son of Lazi zt"l VogelsDorf

# Rabbi Ahron Brodie

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## The Winning Approach to Rosh Hashana

What is a winning approach to Rosh Hashana and with what revitalized dedication can we go forth from Rosh Hashana?

Rebbe Yisroel Salanter taught us how to approach Rosh Hashana by studying the theme of the tefillos. The Rosh Hashana tefillos do not mention any request for forgiveness. Nor do the tefillos mention requests for personal needs. The absence of these requests is striking: Shouldn't we daven for forgiveness and our personal needs? Instead of this we find that the theme of the davening is prayer for universal recognition of Hashem's sovereignty. We come before Hashem and tell Him that the most important thing in our life, and our greatest need, is that we should fear Hashem. We ask Him to enable us and enable the entire world to fear and serve Him. In saying this we are committing ourselves to do everything possible to further this goal. We will be ambassadors of Hashem's service.

Such ambitions raise the person high and earn personal forgiveness. Now we are working exclusively for the

King, and we are therefore provided with an expense account that enables us to fulfill our duties for the King.

This is what Rebbe Yisroel Salanter taught us.

What new strength and new realization can we take with us from Rosh Hashana?

Focusing on the Rosh Hashana prayers that declare that Hashem is the King, who supervises everything and directs everything for our good, we leave Rosh Hashana with a determination to thank Hashem daily for everything He gives us. Of course, we appreciate the multiple blessings He provides us. We realize that, even the apparent difficulties, challenges, obstacles, pitfalls, that we encounter, are absolutely the best possible situation for us. Even if we don't yet understand how or why.

Leaving Rosh Hashana with such an attitude will surely earn us a Kesiva and Chasima Tova on Yom Kippur.

# Rabbi Mordechai Rosenberg



## The Judgement of Rosh Hashana

The Mishna in Tractate Rosh Hashana teaches: “The world is judged during four periods in the year...On Rosh Hashana, all the inhabitants of the world pass before Hashem ‘*k’vnei maron*’, as *B’nei Maron*”. That term, which we will define shortly describes how each person is judged as a lone individual. The Mishna, though, opens up the statement how the **world** is judged. The world is a group, not an individual. Are we judged as individuals or as a group?

It seems that both are true and we are scrutinized as individuals, but also within the context of members of the Jewish Nation and citizens of the world. The verse from Tehillim the Mishna quotes to describe the judgement is “*Hayotzer yachad libam, hameivin el kol ma’aseihem*”, He fashions all their hearts together, He comprehends all their deeds. We are observed as a group, as well as individuals who perform individual deeds. In the bracha of zichronos during the Mussaf service on Rosh Hashana, we also describe the judgement in this way: “And about the countries, it is told on this day which is destined for the sword and which for peace...and creatures are recalled on it to remember them for life or

death”. Entire countries are judged as well as each person.

This can certainly be understood in the following way. We are observed as a group, but the group can be affected by individuals. We are also observed as individuals, but we can be affected by the group.

To explain, the Rambam writes that when a person is faced with a choice of whether or not to do an act, either a positive one or a negative one, he should see his deeds as being completely balanced, exactly half good deeds and half bad ones. If he now does a good deed, he will tip the balance toward the favorable side. If he makes a poor decision, the scale will tip towards the negative side. In addition, the Rambam continues, he should see the whole world as being perfectly balanced on the scale. His negative decision will not only affect himself. It will also bring the entire world to be seen as having a majority of negative deeds. The whole world now is affected by the individual’s choice.

It can also work the other way. Harav Moshe Feinstein Ztz”l explained that when the Torah promises (in the paragraph of “*V’ haya im shamoa*”,

the second section of the Shema) abundance in return for keeping the commandments, it says “*v'asafta deganecha...*”, and you will gather your grain. The Gemara says that this is not the ideal situation. If the community really performs as Hashem's Will dictates, there would be no need to gather grain. That job would be performed by others, leaving more time for spiritual pursuits. So we can have an individual, who, based on his own merits will deserve to have all his chores done for him, but since the community is not so deserving, he must do the job himself. So the individual is held back because of the community's compromises. At any rate, we are judged as individuals and as a group.

Rabbi Yitzchak Blaser, Ztz”l, also known as Rav Itzel Peterburger elaborates on this theme in an essay in the *Sefer Kochwei Ohr*. Many years ago, I had the privilege to study this section with Harav Shaul Kagan, Ztz”l, the former Rosh Kollel of Kollel Bais Yitzchok.

The Gemara explains the Mishna we brought done before. On Rosh Hashana, all the inhabitants of the world pass before Hashem ‘*k'vei maron*’, as B’nei Maron”. The Gemara asks: What is B’nei Maron? The Gemara offers three interpretations. In Eretz Yisrael they defined it as the opening of a sheep pen, which only allows one sheep at a time to exit and be counted. Reish Lakish explained

that this was a very narrow mountain path with steep drops on either side which only allows one person to pass at a time. Rav Yehuda quoting Shmuel says that it refers to the soldiers of the House of David, who were counted one by one as they were chosen to be sent out to battle. The Gemara concludes that even though the judgement is on each individual, but all are observed simultaneously. Again, the judged are viewed as individuals as well as communally.

Rav Itzel questions this Gemara's discussion. Why do we need multiple illustrations to explain how individuals can only be considered one by one? Isn't it simple, Hashem judges each person one after the other. Who doesn't understand that? What are these examples and why are they necessary? Another question: Why did Hashem have to, as it were, judge one after the other, couldn't He find a way to judge everyone individually without doing it “one after the other”? Rav Itzel explains that the Creator, in His kindness and mercy, prepared a strategy to offer us hope and a solution so that we can survive the strict scrutiny of the judgement successfully. The advice is that we approach the Day of Judgement specifically in this manner.

He prefaches his explanation with another Gemara in Tractate Rosh Hashana. When a king and his subjects are brought to be judged, the king is brought in first, ahead of

the subjects. One explanation offered by the Talmud is that he should be allowed to be judged before there is too much anger on account of the many sins of the people. The king is given the courtesy to go first so he would have a better chance to be judged with compassion. He gets in before the anger sets in.

Hashem set up the process of the judgement above in the same manner as courts operate on the earth below. Even though the Almighty knows exactly what everybody did this year, His knowledge has no effect until He actually sits in Judgement. On Rosh Hashana, which is the day of the awesome judgement, when the very lives of all His creations are in the balance, if the judging was made completely simultaneously, everybody together, then no one would stand a chance to avoid the anger caused by multiple sins of the multitudes. For this reason Hashem set up his justice system in such a way that everybody enters the judgement **one after the other**, so that those who make it in earlier can avoid the situation arising from too much anger. Thus, whoever follows another person in the order of being judged will be in a more precarious situation than the one preceding him, but in better shape than the one following him!

The illustrations the Gemara gives to describe how the judgement approaches individuals are not simply explaining how one follows the other.

They are strategies one can use to successfully merit a good judgement. One may question: How can a person merit a good judgement? There are three possibilities:

If he clearly deserves getting a good judgement based on his virtue.

If he has some merits, which can be cashed in if he can arouse Hashem's mercy.

If there is some secret reason for Hashem's mercy to be directed to him, even if he is not worthy.

When Hashem judges the righteous, the *Tzadikim*, He wants them to be protected from any potential anger. He therefore judges them like sheep leaving a pen. When there are many animals in a corral, and a small door is opened to allow them to go out, who goes out first? Certainly the strongest, healthiest and biggest animals! The strongest and most righteous individuals will get the privilege of going through first to be judged.

Those who are not the most righteous people, but who might emerge victorious because of merits they might have, can be considered first if they arrive first to be judged. When there are many people trying to arrive at a certain spot to receive something, for example travelers wanting to purchase tickets for their journey, the ones who make it to the front of the line will get in first. These people should prepare themselves

properly for the Day of Judgement by doing *teshuva*, repentance, on their transgressions and mapping out the correct way to serve Hashem. They will get in first by virtue of simply showing up first. This is described in the Gemara as the narrow path over the mountain, which only allows one to pass one at a time. The one who gets there first will cross first!

Those who really are not righteous, but may be found deserving of a good judgement even if they are not worthy, they are like the soldiers selected to go to war. Those randomly chosen by the officers are sent, regardless of whether they deserve it or not.

Of these three approaches, the only one which is practical to choose is the second approach, the narrow mountain trail. If a person knows

he is a *Tzadik*, he might rely on his own deeds to be judged accordingly. If a person knows he will be chosen randomly, he can rely on that. But one who is not confident that his righteousness will get himself through, and he cannot rely on being chosen randomly, can only hope to get himself to the front of the line. He then might avoid the anger the world might face after too many less righteous people were already judged.

Rav Itzel concludes that the sooner one begins his preparation for the *Yom Hadin*, the Day of Judgement, the closer he will be getting to the front of the line. This will give him a much better shot at enabling those merits he does have to contribute to merititing a positive outcome for a year of life, success and happiness.

## Rabbi Yossi Berkowitz



### Preparing for Judgement

Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgement. It's the day when our life is scrutinized by Hashem and the Heavenly Court, and our fate is in the balance. We pray long and hard to merit a good year. We blow the shofar, eat symbolic foods and prepare for this great day by doing all sorts of extra acts of kindness and mitzvos because we know how significant this day is.

However there's an interesting aspect to the way we prepare for Rosh Hashanah that doesn't seem to match the fear that Rosh Hashanah requires. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 681:4) says that on Erev Rosh Hashanah we should shave, shower and don our Yom Tov best as we prepare for Yom Tov. The Mishna Berurah explains that although we have a fear of the judgement, we trust

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that Hashem will grant us a good year. The Shulchan Aruch rules that we are to enjoy festive meals with meat and wine because Rosh Hashanah is a joyous time.

How can we be so confident that Hashem will give us a good year? We all know that we have flaws, and during this time of year when we examine our actions and deeds we will surely see areas where we need improvement. Shouldn't that make us all the more fearful of a harsh judgement? Shouldn't that demand we dress as one going to the gallows and prepare for the worst? Shouldn't we be fasting and abstaining from festivities and enjoying ourselves?

Rabbi Matisyahu Solomon Shlit'a in his sefer Matnas Chaim explains our conduct during this time based on what the Malbim writes about the verse we say during Elul in L'dovid Hashem Ori -- "שבתי בבית ה' כל ימי חי". We desire to sit in the House of Hashem all the days of our life, to

be as close to Hashem as possible. During Elul we daven and work hard to become better Jews and show Hashem that we want to be closer to Him.

With this in mind we can understand our behavior as we prepare for Rosh Hashanah. It's true that we have faults and there's always room for improvement in our lives, but when we take those first steps of trying to get better and to show Hashem our true aspirations, we can confidently come into judgement knowing Hashem will indeed grant us a good year. By telling Hashem that we want our lives to be focused on doing His will we are proving ourselves worthy subjects of the King. Then we can enter Rosh Hashanah with a confidence knowing that while we are being judged we are also faithful servants of the King and we can ask for and be granted success, blessing and health for the new year.

**Ksiva Vachasima Tovah!**

# Rabbi Moshe Gans



## Is Rosh Hashana a Joyous Holiday?

The halachos of Rosh Hashana present us with a seemingly perplexing conundrum. On the one hand, we don't recite the Hallel. The reason for this is that it is inappropriate to do so at a time when The Books of the Living and the Books of the Dead are open for Hashem to judge us. On the other hand, we bathe and groom ourselves beforehand, and wear nice clothing in honor of the Yom Tov. This seems to indicate that Rosh Hashana is a joyous time. Which one is it - is Rosh Hashana a time of fear and trepidation, or is it a joyous holiday?

Apparently, Rosh Hashana is in fact a time of both joy and fear. But, why is this so, and what's the reasoning behind each of these seemingly conflicting emotions?

Rav Shimshon Pincus offers the following explanation. Rosh Hashana is the Day of Judgement. On this day, Hashem inscribes for each of us what will be in the year to come. There are no guarantees from one year to the next. The fear and trepidation are due to our recognizing the seriousness of such a judgment.

(Unfortunately, the COVID-19 Pandemic has demonstrated this very clearly. What has occurred over the last six months would have been

impossible to imagine just one year ago.)

On the other hand, the judgment is not carried out by merely a judge. Rather, Hashem, the King Himself, is the one who passes the judgement. When a king passes judgement, he has the power to act with mercy and compassion, and so it is when Hashem, the King of all kings, passes judgement on Rosh Hashana. We are joyous due to our knowing that Hashem is acting with His infinite kindness and compassion, thereby allowing us a sense of security that Hashem will in fact vindicate us.

However, Rav Pincus concludes that there is an important condition necessary for Hashem's wanting to judge us kindly. A king of flesh and blood would only act in this manner for those who are close to him. Similarly, the King of all kings acts in this manner for those who have a close and loving relationship with Him. If one merely serves Hashem out of a sense of duty, he is lacking that special relationship. We must recognize that Hashem is our loving Father and King, and serve Him also out of love.

May we and our families all be blessed with a good and healthy year!

# Rabbi Chananel Shapiro



## Shofar: Alarm Clock or Lullaby

The Rambam (hilchos teshuva 3:4) tells us that a reason for blowing shofar on Rosh Hashanah is to awaken us from our spiritual slumber. All the rest of the year we are busy with our physical needs and so we lose focus from our spiritual needs. When we hear the shofar it is supposed to redirect our focus to do teshuva. In truth, a shofar is not much more than a musical instrument. In fact, the gemara discusses the halacha of a person who blows the shofar for musical purposes. So how do we make sure that we get the right message when we hear the shofar and not just feel like we're at a concert?

The pasuk in parshas Emor (Lev. 23:24) introduces us to the yom tov of Rosh Hashanah as follows: *bachodesh hashivii b'echad lachodesh yiheiyyeh lachem Shabbason zichron teruah mikreh kodesh-* the first of the month there shall be a rest day for you, a remembrance with shofar blasts, a holy convocation. There are a few difficulties with this pasuk. First of all, while other festivals are also referred to as a 'rest day', here the torah specifies a rest day *for you*. What is the significance of the resting from labor on this day more than other festivals that it is for us? Secondly, if

there is a mitzvah to actually blow shofar, why does the Torah call it a 'remembrance'? Lastly, there is a halacha that we never blow a tekia (long blast) without a terua (broken blast) or a terua without a tekia. In that case, why does the pasuk only tell us about the terua?

Netziv explains this pasuk in his sefer *קמעה רביה* based on a passage in parshas Behaloscha (Numbers 10:9-10). This passage tells of certain occasions when we are supposed to blow trumpets in the beis hamikdash. On festivals we are to blow a tekia, and when going to war we blow a terua. Here, we are faced with questions similar to the above: Why mention only one blast in each instance when in fact we never blow one without the other? In addition, why specify a different blast each time? Netziv explains as follows: the tekia and terua each represent a different mood. The tekia stands for an upbeat and happy mood, while the terua signifies a serious and somber mood. Although we always blow both types, one of them is the main one, depending on the occasion. On festivals, the tekia is the main blast meant to engender joy and the terua accompanies it to remind us not to get carried away lest we come

to sin. When we go to war the terua is the main blast in accordance with the seriousness of the battle. It is accompanied by the tekia to remind us not to lose hope and to put faith in Hashem's salvation.

With this idea we can understand the pasuk in parshas Emor. The terua specifically is mentioned due to the serious nature of the day. However, just hearing the blast is not enough.

We also must be cognizant of the meaning behind the blast. Indeed, the gemara entertains the idea that one does not fulfill his obligation of hearing shofar by blowing for musical purposes.

This, then, is the idea of the 'remembrance' of the terua on this

day. How do we accomplish this? How do we ascertain that we are awakened by the shofar blast? The answer lies in the puzzling phrase "a rest day for you". The Torah is teaching us that in addition to the resting from work that is common to all festivals, there is an additional rest on Rosh Hashanah that we would be well advised to engage in. We should take a few minutes and divest ourselves of all other activities and thoughts -- just rest -- and think about the meaning of the shofar blasts. If we spend this time internalizing the message of the shofar, then we can hope that hearing the blasts will have the intended effect.

May we all merit a Kesiva V'chasima Tova!!

# Rabbi Levi Langer



## Turnabout

The evil queen Vashti, a villain of the Purim story, was put to death on Yom Kippur. So it is taught.

The proof of this is straightforward: according to tradition. Avashveirosh's 180-day feast began on 1 Nissan. The 180 days lasted until 3 Tishrei, about six months later. There was then a seven-day feast for the people of Shushan, at the end of which Vashti was put to death, on 10 Tishrei, Yom Kippur.

There is a lesson in that, writes R. David Luria, in his classic commentary on Midrash. It is this: even when tough times are in store, as they were then with the ascent of Haman, Hashem makes sure to prepare the cure in advance on Yom Kippur. Difficult times were in store for the Jews -- but Vashti's death at this point paved the way for the coronation of Esther, who would eventually bring about the salvation.

We've been through tough times this past year. It was a year when a pandemic ravaged the world. And it's sobering to consider how all this

was foreordained in Heaven last Yom Kippur.

We cannot know why it was decreed that this terrible illness would be visited upon the world. But we do know this: if we're now seeing final-stage trials for a vaccine, if we're now seeing the beginning of the end of this difficult time, then this too was foreordained last Yom Kippur. *Hikdim refuah lamakkah* -- He prepared the cure before He brought the harsh times.

Hashem is looking to turn things around now, but He's waiting for us to make the first move. This is our chance. Yom Kippur, teaches R. Yisroel Salanter, is a day when Hashem opens wide the wellsprings of mercy and then waits to see if we'll rise to the challenge of the moment. Let us seize the moment. Let us reach out to Him and dedicate ourselves to focus on the spiritual in life, on being mission-centered people who will achieve for God and for His world. Then we will surely merit the fullness of the Yom Kippur blessings.

# Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky



## Being Sorry – a Reflection on Teshuva

It's been a long time since then, but I distinctly remember my son sitting in the corner after he'd done something he shouldn't have and regretting it mightily. He must have been around five or six years old at the time, and he was quite a mischievous fellow.

After letting him sulk for a while, my wife went over to explain to him what he had done wrong. But no sooner did she open her mouth when he stopped her in her tracks and assured her, probably quoting from a Shmuel Kunda tape, "I said I was sorry."

Nonetheless, the state of *being* sorry is distinctly different from just saying the words "I'm sorry."

We are now in the season of being sorry. Throughout the month of Elul, and certainly during these Ten days of Teshuvah, Yom Kippur being the highlight, the phrase "I'm sorry" is often heard. The point is not to just verbalize the sentiment but to actually feel remorse.

But what does being sorry mean?

"Sorry" can mean many things in English. In some cases, it's not even associated with forgiveness, as in the

Hebrew "slach li", which literally means "forgive me."

I realized this discrepancy only recently. Over the past two years, after losing my mother and then my father, of blessed memory, a lot of people told me that they were "sorry" for my loss. While I'd heard those words countless times before, when hearing them addressed to me, though outwardly gracious I was inwardly puzzled.

"Why are you sorry?" I would murmur in an undertone. "It's not your fault."

I figured out that in that context "sorry" must be related to sorrow, meaning that they felt sorrow because of my loss.

Saying that you are sorry is not always an expression of genuine lament. After all, why would the phone company grieve when a person accidentally misdials a telephone number? Still, someone had to have programmed that mechanical voice to intone: "we're sorry, but your call cannot be completed as dialed. Please check the area code and dial again or ask your operator for assistance."

I hope the people who used the same

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terminology after the passing of my parents felt a little sadder than the one who tells you you've dialed a wrong number.

To me, saying "I'm sorry" seems to be all about yourself, without regard for the other person's feelings. You are informing the aggrieved party how *you* feel, but are you beseeching his forgiveness? Saying you're sorry and asking for forgiveness isn't the same thing. And asking someone for mechilah can also have nothing to do with contrition.

Think back to your childhood. Can you remember standing in your aunt Zelda's kitchen, looking down at the ground and swaying slightly back and forth as you muttered "I'm sorry" for having said that her kugel tasted horrible? Your voice was so low that not even the CIA's most powerful microphones would have been able to pick it up. Then you scampered away, never to look her in the face again until your bar mitzvah. But when your mother asked you if you'd apologized, you responded, "I said I was sorry," as if you'd spent an hour begging her for forgiveness.

Indeed, for us humans whose feelings are so easily hurt, asking for forgiveness is the crucial element.

In Hilchos Teshuvah, the Rambam writes that sins between man and his fellow man cannot be absolved unless the transgressor asks for the injured

party's forgiveness: "Even if a person restores the money he owes, he must appease [the person he was indebted to] and ask for his forgiveness." This holds true for verbal indiscretions, as well.

Still, it's kind of amazing that among the myriad details of the laws of teshuvah between man and his Creator, the Rambam makes no mentions of a requirement to ask for forgiveness from the Almighty. All you have to do is make an admission of guilt (*viduy*), spell out exactly what you did wrong, feel remorse and resolve never to do it again.

Indeed, the Ribono Shel Olam isn't interested in appeasement, as it states in Shmuel 1 (15:29), "For He is not man that he be appeased." What Hashem really wants is for us to understand ourselves and make ourselves better.

Pardon the analogy, but as a parent, I sometimes felt that way, too. Just knowing that my children would be good from now on was enough for me. I didn't need them to beg me for forgiveness.

Although we will never hear the response from Hashem "I forgive you" as Moshe did, we can be confident that if we follow the steps required for doing teshuvah, He will forgive us.

Last week I was driving in Manhattan and swerved to avoid a car that had cut into my lane. My action caused a reaction, which meant that the fellow

behind me had to suddenly apply his brakes. The man became irate and began honking his horn at me incessantly. I didn't look at him, fearful that meeting his eye might provoke a bullet between mine. I had no desire to become a victim of road rage and end up in a cautionary video.

Nonetheless, the almost bumper-to-bumper traffic and red lights brought him as close to me as fate would allow. A few minutes later I realized that he had pulled up right next to me and was screaming through his rolled-down passenger side window. My gaze remained firmly ahead, although I kept saying "I'm sorry" loudly enough for him to have heard me if he'd

only stopped yelling for a minute.

Then it hit me, or more actually, my window. The gentleman had hurled a plastic bottle of Poland Spring water at me as an expression of his wrath. Fortunately, the window didn't break and it bounced off and hit the ground. Then the light turned green and the lunatic sped off.

By then I was so hot and thirsty that I briefly regretted not having kept the window open.

You might not always be able to obtain someone's forgiveness. But that doesn't mean that you don't have to become a better person, following all the steps involved in the teshuvah process.

## Rabbi Yossi Berkowitz



### Who We Really Are

The Shulchan Aruch tells us (Orach Chaim 603) that during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva even those that regularly eat non-Jewish bakery bread, should only eat Jewish baked bread. The Rem'a elaborates on this idea and says that during these special days of repentance one must examine his or her daily life and carefully analyze all their actions to see what needs improvement. A person must also be extremely careful during these days to work on their middos and work harder to treat others with

respect.

There's an obvious question here. If we are going to continue eating bread from a non-Jewish bakery after Yom Kippur, then why do we pretend to be extra righteous during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva? Why do we pretend then to be someone we're not, especially at a time when we want Hashem to judge us favorably?

My Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Shimon Alster Shlit'a gives a mashal to explain what

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we're really doing. When someone has their picture taken especially at a wedding they make sure they look their absolute best. They'll wear their nicest clothing, button up their shirt, fix their tie etc. so that the picture comes out perfect. Here too one can look at the picture and see a false representation of who they are - that's not how they look on a regular day! That's not even how they looked throughout the wedding - they only perfected their image for the photo! Is it all a lie?

The answer is that when we dress our best, make sure that no hair is out of place and our tie is straight for the picture, what we truly are saying is that this is who we really are-who we really want to be. The rest of the time we may not be able to show it but when the spotlight is on us for the picture we show our true essence. The same is true, says Rabbi Alster, about

the Aseres Yemei Teshuva. It's true that during the year we aren't perfect-far from it! But we really want to be better! Deep down we know where and how we can improve. So during these ten days we act the part of who we really want to be. We show Hashem that this is who we are and we ask to be judged in this light. And even if we can't maintain it all year that is only because we are human: we have faults and weaknesses. It is not for lack of desire.

With this in mind we **can** indeed take upon ourselves different practices during Aseres Yemei Teshuva, we **can** work on our interpersonal relationships and our middos and be true to ourselves. When Hashem sees how we act and who we really are, He will judge us favorably and we will merit to be signed in the Book of Life!

Gmar Chasima Tovah!

## Rabbi Shmuli Mandelbaum



### Who are we Fooling?

Many have heard the joke "call me back on motzei Yom Kippur and I'll tell you all the gossip then." Throughout the days preceding Rosh Hashanah and continuing on until Yom Kippur, we tend to act and speak differently. We are full of remorse and guilt. "How can we act like that on Erev Rosh Hashana"

"how can we speak or hurt someone on Yom Kippur" Yet who are we trying to fool? Hashem knows exactly what is going on. But more importantly I didn't change.

Why should I fake it, if it isn't a lasting change? What is the point of pretending

to be someone that I am not? Especially if it is not a more permanent change?

There is a Mashal, a parable, that brings out a point which answers this fundamental question.

There once was a king who was preparing to visit a far-flung village in the corner of his kingdom. The village got notice of the king's arrival a few months in advance. Everyone in the town was ecstatic and getting themselves ready for the king's arrival. People were cleaning their homes, donning their Shabbos clothes, fixing up their lawns and sprucing up the town. The king was scheduled to walk down the main street in town. All the store keepers were busy renovating and redoing their store fronts for the honor of the king.

There was one store owner who felt that he doesn't care about the king and what he is going to think. No matter what he was told, he insisted that he doesn't need to fix up his store front. The store owner refused by saying, "My store is the same store whether the king is here or not."

When the King came, he was very impressed with the town being all spruced up in his honor. The decorations and all the cleanliness of the town greatly impressed the king. He appreciated the honor that the entire town was displaying for him despite being far away from the actual capital and somewhat removed from interactions with the king.

However, when he reached the one shop that refused to do anything to honor the king, it was an eyesore. The king was entirely outraged by the audacity of the shopkeeper. How dare he not show honor for the king by at least doing something. He summoned the store owner and asked him what his reasoning was for disgracing the honor of the king.

The simple-minded store owner, not realizing he was headed to a not too sunny place, told the king what he had said to the others all along. "My store is the same store whether the king is here or not."

What an embarrassment to the king. Obviously, the king didn't find this logic so convincing and we can be sure that this shopkeeper got what was coming to him.

Hashem comes once a year and draws us close to him. He is going to examine our every deed and how we act. He is like the king who comes to visit. How will we prepare for and respond to His upcoming visit? Will we put on our best face, or will we be like the store owner who says "My actions stay the same whether the king is here or not." We might not be able to maintain all the changes and improvements we make for the visit, but we still need to properly treat and respect the king and show that respect when He comes to visit. We have to show Hashem that we care about him and his Torah, and therefore we must do what we can to show that.

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There is also yet another explanation as to why we go through the motions if it is of no lasting effect. Sometimes the Yetzer harah comes and tries to trick people. He makes them depressed and tries to make them give up.” “Who am I fooling? Hashem knows that tomorrow I will most likely fall back. My teshuva won’t be accepted anyway.” We then start to doubt the power of our teshuva.

The Mabit (who lived in the 15th century) gives a mighty blow to these negative thoughts. He writes that people sometimes feel that right after Yom Kippur they go back to their old ways and think that Hashem won’t accept his teshuvah if it wasn’t a permanent change. Says the Mabit, this is a mistake. Once a person has a sincere thought not to go back in his bad ways, “Hashem maavir chataso bteshuva hazos.” “Hashem removes his sin with this Teshuva”.

Unfortunately, he will likely go back and do aveiros and sin again. The Yetzer harah came and convinced him to do the sin anew. But it has nothing to do with his original aveirah. Hashem erased the past and has started his account fresh. When a person does the same aveirah he should know that it is not the same as he has done before. As long as when he was thinking of doing teshuvah he fully decided to not to continue with this avierah, it is a new aveirah.

Hashem knows that he created us with a Yetzer Harah and that battle with the Yetzer Harah is always present. There is

a Rashi in Berachos that tells us that if not for the yetzer harah the Jews would have been finished off years ago. It is only because we have a yetzer harah and Hashem knows that we are only human and we are very weak when standing up to the temptations of the Yetzer harah.

Imagine for a moment if we were watching a hypnotist. He hypnotizes people and gets them to act subconsciously without them realizing their actions. If we see them doing something strange that isn’t their usual way of doing it, we know it is because they are in a trance which was placed by the hypnotist.

It is the same with the Yezter harah. We ourselves would never eat without a beracha or say or do something inappropriate. It’s the Yezer Harah that ensnares us in his net. It is as if we are possessed by another force.

We go through a Yom Kippur and do teshuva while being cleansed of all our aveiros. We hope not to fall into the same trap that we always fall into. We sometimes turn blue with depression and start doubting whether our Teshuva is even worth anything. The Mabit is telling us that as long as we have sincere thoughts of teshuvah we will be forgiven and start with a clean slate.

We should all merit to do proper Teshuva and be written in the book of life, health, parnassah and yeshuos.

# Rabbi Doniel Schon



## Sukkah: a Divine Embrace

When the Torah describes the mitzva of sitting in a Sukkah it mentions that we sit in the Sukkah in order to remember that HaShem caused us to dwell in sukkahs throughout our miraculous journey through the desert upon redeeming us from Mitzrayim. The Gemara in Maseches Succah has a debate whether the sukkahs that we are commemorating are clouds of glory that enveloped the Jewish nation throughout the journey, or the actual huts that the Jews lived in. But regardless, the Succah reminds us of the miraculous journey that HaShem led us through the desert. The Bach points out that since the Torah went out of its way to describe a reason for the mitzva of sitting in a Sukkah, it is imperative to actually contemplate the Jews' miraculous journey through the desert while one sits in the Sukkah in order to perform the mitzva in its most optimal way.

Many commentators ask - if the mitzva of dwelling in sukkahs is to remind us how HaShem took care of us through the desert then why do we celebrate it in the fall? Pesach also commemorates how HaShem took us out of Mitzrayim and we celebrate it in the spring when HaShem took us out. Why then is Succos which also

commemorates HaShem taking us out of mItzrayim celebrated in the fall?

The answer commonly given is that if we were to celebrate Succos in the spring, then our sitting in the Succah would not be recognizable that it is being done for a mitzva purpose. Many people leave their homes in the spring to go outside to enjoy the warmer weather, so if we observed Succos in the Spring it would not be recognizable as being done for a mitzva. However, in the fall when people are generally leaving their summer homes and returning to their more permanent homes, when a Jew leaves his permanent home and enters a more temporary dwelling it is apparent that he is doing so for a mitzva purpose.

The Vilna Gaon offers a deeper explanation to the question. He says that when the Gemara mentions that we sit in a Sukkah to commemorate the clouds of glory it is not referring to the general idea that there were clouds of glory surrounding the Jews through their journey, but specifically to the clouds of glory that returned to protect the Jewish nation after Moshe had obtained complete forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf.

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The Vilna Gaon explains the timeline as follows. The possuk tells us that after the sin of the golden calf the clouds of glory left the Jewish nation. On Yom Kippur, the 10th of Tishrei, Moshe had successfully lobbied HaShem to forgive the Jewish nation for the sin of the golden calf and the people were completely forgiven. On the 11th of Tishrei Moshe instructed the nation to donate materials for the construction of the mishkan. On the 12th and 13 of Tishrei the Jews brought an abundance of donations. On the 14th the donated materials were distributed to the craftsmen. Then the next day, the 15th of Tishrei (which is the first day of Succos), the Jewish people began to build the mishkan and the clouds of glory returned to their position protecting the Jews.

According to this interpretation it is quite clear why we celebrate Succos exactly where it is in the calendar. We are not merely commemorating the event that HaShem protected the Jewish nation with the clouds of glory, rather we are commemorating the fact that even though the Jews lost the protection of the clouds of glory after the sin of the golden calf, through our sincere teshuva HaShem restored the clouds of glory, signifying that the Jews had regained their special connection to HaShem. Therefore, we celebrate Succos on the 15th of Tishrei as that was the day that clouds were restored after the sin of the golden calf.

Rav Dovid Cohen, adds that this explanation of the holiday of Succos fits beautifully with the way the Vilna Gaon explains the give-and-take between Moshe and HaShem after the sin of the golden calf. In the beginning of Shmos chapter 32, HaShem informs Moshe that the Jews have sinned and that He plans on destroying them. Moshe immediately pleads on behalf of the Jews and shortly after the Torah writes (32:14) *vayinachem Hashem al ha'raah aher diber la'asos-* HaShem reconsidered the punishment He planned on inflicting upon the Jews. However, even after this assurance Moshe continues to plead with HaShem. Why did he continue? Hasn't HaShem already assured Moshe that He will not destroy the Jews?

The Rashbam explains that when Moshe asked HaShem *hodeinei na es dirachecha* – show me your ways (Shmos 33:13) Moshe was asking that HaShem personally lead the Jews into Eretz Yisroel. This was in response to HaShem mentioning *Vishalachti lifanecha malach* – and I will send before you an angel (Shmos 33:2). Even though HaShem had already forgiven the Jews for the sin of the golden calf, and would not destroy them, there would still be a punishment that remained – that they would be led by an angel, not by HaShem Himself. This is why Moshe continued to plead on behalf of the Jews, and Moshe did not back down

until HaShem responded (Shmos 34:10) *hinei anochi koreis bris negged kol amcha e'eseh niflaos* – behold I will seal a covenant, before the entire nation I will make wonders. It was only at this point that HaShem had fully forgiven the Jews and exalted them to the lofty status that they were on before the sin of the golden calf. The Vilna Gaon comments that the *niflaos*- wonders (Shmos 34:10) referred to the return of the clouds of glory, because their return was the sign that HaShem had fully forgiven the Jewish nation, reinstating their

previous special relationship with HaShem.

So, this Succos, when we sit in the Sukkah and contemplate the huts and clouds of glory with which HaShem protected us during our journey through the desert, let's also think about the fact that the Sukkah reminds us that HaShem is willing to take us back even after we've sinned. Following a meaningful and productive Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur we can rejoice in the presence of Hashem.

## Rabbi Yisroel Miller



### Big Joys, Little Joys

We do not know the reason for every mitzvah, and reasons are not always necessary for us to know. The mitzvah of succah is different, in that the Torah not only gives a reason, but also (according to Bach, Orach Chaim 625) commands us to think of that reason when we are in the succah: "Lemaan yeidu doroseichem, that all your generations should know" how Hashem protected us in the wilderness for 40 years, and He continues to protect us today.

Isn't it odd that the symbol of Divine protection is a fragile, rickety succah, three or four walls with some sticks or branches of schach on top? Why

not symbolize Divine protection by building a miniature fortress, stone walls and a tower of strength to proclaim the might of Hashem? Besides being a more impressive reminder, would that not be a truer expression of our gratitude for the Divine protection that guides our lives?

Every Yom Tov includes a mitzvah of rejoicing, but Succos joy, "zman simchaseinu, the time of our rejoicing," is the greatest of all. What is the high point of this rejoicing? The Mishnah says that the greatest rejoicing occurred on Succos in the Beis Hamikdash, when our ancestors

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gave thanks to Hashem with an offering of water on the mizbe'ach, the alter. There was singing and dancing led by the greatest Sages, all part of thanking Hashem for the life-giving blessing of water.

The mizbe'ach was a place for many other offerings as well; baked goods and wine and meat, offerings which afford much greater simchah than plain water. So why is that the greatest celebration was reserved for H2O?

Perhaps the answer is: the Torah is teaching us how to become happy, the way to attain the state of true simchas Yom Tov. And that way is: In order to appreciate the blessing of luxuries, we must first learn to appreciate the blessing of basic necessities.

There are many stories of tzaddikim who ate nothing but bread and water. But I once heard from Rav Avigdor Miller that when the tzaddik made a brachah over his crust of bread, and he said, "Baruch ata Hashem, the source of this blessed bread is You, Hashem"; Elokeinu Melech Haolam, Sovereign of the world who is our G-d, who cares for each one of us"; "hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz, Who miraculously takes bread out of the ground, tasty nutrition from dirt!" that tzaddik savored his crust of bread with a simchah we will never know.

Appreciate the blessing of bread. Celebrate the great gift of water. Learn to feel the ecstasy in the basics. And then you can come to truly enjoy the

meat and wine and everything else.

The succah is a three-dimensional thank-you note to Hashem for protecting us, in ancient times and today. How often do we complain that something in our home is inconvenient, or in need of repair, or is not as splendid as that of our neighbors? The succah reminds us: Give thanks for the exquisite joy that Hashem has blessed you with four walls and a roof over your head, even if it is only a roof of s'chach. Thousands of people live on the streets of India (and more than a few on the streets of America) without any shelter at all. First learn to savor the pleasure of having the one-room shelter of a succah, and then you will be able to rejoice in the palatial home you reside in all year round.

There is the beautiful joy of food and drink, beginning with water. There is the joyous beauty of a home, beginning with a succah. And there is the joy of beauty itself, the happiness we experience from the aesthetic dimension which is part of human life. The Torah speaks of beauty many times, from the "glory and splendor" ("lechavod ul'sifares," Exodus 28:2) of the Kohen's vestments to the sages' lamenting that handsome men and women must die ("hai shufra d'vali b'afra," Berachos 5b and elsewhere) to their instituting a special berachah to say when seeing beautiful things (Orach Chaim 225:10). And on Succos, as part of our joyous

thanksgiving, the Torah commands us to rejoice before Hashem with a thing of beauty, “pri eitz hadar,” the fruit of beauty which we call an esrog.

Is an esrog, or an esrog tree, so beautiful? (True, the price of a piece of art and the price of an esrog are comparable, but we seldom think of esrogim as fine art.) But the Torah says it is beautiful, and it is, with an aesthetic value all its own. An esrog is not the Mona Lisa. But if we focus on it, simply to enjoy its color and symmetry and bouquet and the exquisite feel of the most beautiful fruit in Eretz Yisrael, we too can come to feel the joy of pri eitz hadar.

Along with the *esrog* we are to take *hadassim*, which the Torah calls *anaf eitz avos*, a bracelet of intertwined leaves; *aravos*, called *arvei nachal*, willows of the brook, calling to mind a willow tree overhanging a tranquil country stream; and a *lulav*, called *kapos temarim*, literally a palm, a hand, offering us its clusters of dates.

We are commanded to take these plants “usemachtem lifnei Hashem,” rejoice with them before Hashem. That joy includes all symbolism taught by the Sages, that *lulav* and *esrog* represent different kinds of Jews, and different parts of the body, all joining together for the mitzvah. But even without the symbolism, even for the simple Jew who knows only the simple meaning of the words, the mitzvah is given to us to enjoy the

physical beauty of the here and now, rejoicing with the mitzvos of beauty which are given to all of us to share.

Today, with sportscars, smartphones, computers and all sorts of electronic toys to entertain us, one would expect that our joys would be much greater than those of our grandparents. But it is not so. Too much sugar desensitizes the palate, and we cannot enjoy the finer things when our senses are overwhelmed by the noise of extravaganza. The pounding of rock music (even “Jewish” rock music) makes it harder to appreciate a subtle melody line, and the patter of the comedian deadens our ability to appreciate true wit.

The evening of the 1964 American presidential election, one of the national television networks sponsored a 20-minute discussion by partisans of the rival candidates, an informal debate between intelligent, articulate noncelebrities. For the 1976 elections the debaters were invited back for a rematch, but the producers would allow them only seven minutes of discussion instead of 20; because research indicated that in the intervening 12 years, the American public had lost the ability to concentrate more than 420 seconds at a stretch (I have not checked the more recent figures, because I’m afraid to find out). Excess of every sort destroys our ability to enjoy the basic, which ultimately destroys every available joy.

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An American fighter pilot was once lost in the Pacific Ocean, stranded on a life raft for 26 days. When he was finally rescued, he was asked if he had learned anything from his ordeal. He replied: "I learned that if you have enough to eat, and all the fresh water you need to drink, then you should never, ever worry about anything."

Succos is a time for simchah. The simchah that Hashem gives us shelter, and water, and beauties of nature,

and so much more. The Halachah is to drink wine on Yom Tov, and that a husband should buy new clothing for his wife. The outcome is a beautiful family in a beautiful home, rejoicing together with beautiful Jews everywhere in zman simchaseinu, the time of rejoicing for all the blessings of Hashem's beautiful world, a world in which the greatest beautify is the blessing of being alive.

## Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky



### The Hidden Life of Lulavim – Taking Cues from Nature

Much as I hate to admit to the limits of my intellect, there are many aspects of Sukkos that lie beyond my understanding. This incomprehension stems from the contrast between the clarity of the sukkah and shelter symbolism, and the deep esoteric substance of the *arba minim*- the *lulav*, *esrog*, *hadasim* and *aravos*.

There is no other mitzvah, in my opinion, where more time is spent contemplating its acquisition than performing the mitzvah itself. Hours upon hours can be spent looking for the perfect *esrog*, yet, technically, the minute one picks up the *lulav* and *esrog* and gives it a slight shukel, he has performed his obligation according to

the Torah.

When I was younger, I relished the ability to go from store to store and from vendor to vendor. I could kler, I could ask, I could bring one back and exchange. *Esrogim* were like a sugya in Shas, and I was like a beis midrash bachur in one of the yeshivos that took a month to finish a daf. I could pore over an *esrog* discussing a bump or a bletel with the same diligence that I could ponder a svara. As time moved onward, I began to rely more and more on others- my children, or my dear friend who is an *arba minim* expert.

But despite all the efforts I made to choose the four sacred species, the

actual mitzvah was to me a personal parah adumah. Despite the beautiful allegories to hearts and eyes, lips and spines, said to be represented by each of the four species, I still allowed my intellect to be in total subservience in its service to the Creator.

I was baffled by the midrashim about unity, where the four minim represent four different types of Jews. The esrog, which has both a wonderful fragrance and powerful taste, represents the complete tzaddik, who is filled with both Torah and mitzvos. The other species represent Jews of lesser standing. “However,” declare all the teachers, rabbis, and representatives of Jewish thought, “when we are all bound together...” And the ending accords with the theme of their dvar Torah.

It’s beautiful, but I always felt there was more. There is a depth beyond comprehension that I know is there, and without turning to sifrei Kabbalah, I wanted to touch a bit of it. I didn’t mind that I couldn’t grasp the depth of the reasons behind the mitzvah- I had, after all, just spent an entire month in total submission to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, crying out for His presence. Who am I to ask, “What is this mitzvah really all about?”

But how is it possible that I could spend hours pondering the slightest blemish on the physical esrog, while hardly touching the surface of its real meaning?

But last week, my eyes were opened. I visited the office of Baruch Singer, a dear friend and patron of mine, a talmid of distinguished roshei yeshivah of the previous generation. Normally our discussions are based on a sefer he shows me, or a midrash one of us recently saw. This time he had something else for me.

“I have to give you something to read,” he said. “It will change the way you look at things.”

The word “read” foreshadowed that this was not a dvar Torah, or a sefer, but that’s okay- I read newspaper articles too. From behind his desk, he pulled out a small book, about five by seven inches and surely not more than 300 pages. I wondered what type of book he wanted me to read. Surely not a novel. History? Science? He is a real estate agent with a secret penchant for the Yankees, not very professional. Like my kids say, “Not the type.”

Before I got a chance to read the title, he came around his desk and opened the book. I got just a glimpse of a tree on the cover before he began to wax enthusiastic. “Read just the introduction! Just these few pages!” I had never seen him so in awe of a secular subject.

I turned back to the cover. “The Hidden Life of Trees,” it was titled. The name of the author was Peter Wohlleben, certainly no one I had heard of. My friend interrupted to tell me this book was not only a bestseller, but had been

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written up on the heilige (his words) front page of The New York Times. Despite our shared skepticism of the Times' credibility on politics and Israel, the hype intrigued me. It was a book about nature. About forests and trees. I looked back at the cover, where a picture of three trees and their roots outlines the subtitle: "What They Feel, How They Communicate."

"Vos, bist di meshigeh?" I asked. "What are you giving me to read?"

"Read!" he commanded.

I read. There were 270 pages to skim. I couldn't imagine how one could write so much about trees. But there they were: beech, fir, oak, cedar, each more amazing than the next.

Every paragraph I skimmed contained fascinating facts: healthy trees do chesed for more sickly trees in their presence, shedding their own nutrients to sustain them. For example, when confronted with certain pests, some trees, including the acacia of atzei shittim fame, will emit chemicals that give their leaves a bitter flavor unpleasant to the parasite. Even more fascinating, they then emit a chemical scent that lets other trees know there is a predator on the loose so that they, too, can infuse their leaves with toxic tastes. Other trees that shed nuts wait to drop them until the animal population hibernates, lest they swarm too close and damage its bark. Trees turn branches to protect each other from the elements. They react when

a neighboring tree dies. Branches hundreds of feet above the ground draw water from the roots below.

This is not a dendrology column, and I'm no scientist. But I did take the book home, and every so often I read a chapter in places where one can't learn Torah. I thought of the third chapter of Perek Shirah, where plants of all shapes and sizes sing to the Almighty, and suddenly all my questions about symbols and lulavim dissipated. I realized that there are thousands of miracles and meanings in every capillary of every leaf of every branch of every one of the four minim. My shaking a lulav and esrog, hadasim and aravos, are a once-a-year connection to a forest of flourishing miracles.

An American poet, Joyce Kilmer, once wrote, "Poems are made by fools like me, but only G-d can make a tree." And I know that applies to Ami columnists as well. Like the countless workers amid the foliage, there is so much depth in the comparisons our Sages make to the species. So, it is with a sense of great joy and even greater humility that I pick up the arba minim and, albeit for the slightest moment, connect with the wondrous creation.

I look at the book, the three trees and myriad branches that grace its cover, and I think of an anecdote about another famous nature lover, Theodore Roosevelt. He once went camping with his friend, naturalist William Beebe, and one night as they sat under

the open sky, they found a blur of light near the constellation Pegasus. Together they chanted, "That is the Spiral Galaxy in Andromeda. It is as large as our Milky Way. It is one of a hundred million galaxies. It consists of one hundred billion suns, each larger than our sun."

Roosevelt turned to his friend and said. "Now I think we know how small

we are. Let's go to bed. "

I look at a book, nearly 300 pages filled with arboreal wonders, and I shake my head in awe. I say to myself, now I know how small we are. Now I think I know how little I understand about the leaves of an aravah or the mystery of the esrog. Let's shake the lulav.

## Rabbi Shimon Silver



### First Day and Counting

ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון פרי עץ הדר וגוו' שמחתם לפני ד' אלקיכם שבעת ימים. סוכות זמן שמחתינו.

On the first day, take yourselves [the four species] and rejoice before G-d for seven days. Sukos is called [in our *tefilos*] the time of our joy. Ready for a damper?

"ראשון לحساب עוננות," The Midrash says the First Day – this is the first day of reckoning sins!" If so, how is one expected to rejoice? Is this some sort of test? Rejoice on the first day of reckoning sins

The simple explanation, based on the rest of that same Midrash, is that sins are all forgiven on Yom Kippur, and the *cheshbon*, the account, is erased. After Yom Kippur, a new *cheshbon* begins, a new ledger is opened. But

between Yom Kippur and the first day of Sukos everyone is preoccupied with preparing *mitzvos*. Some are busy building a sukkah and some are picking out the four species, and yet others are preparing food and other things needed for the holiday. There is no time nor opportunity to sin. On the first day of Sukos everyone has a chance to rest and sit back, as there are no more such preoccupations. This is the first opportunity for sin. Thus, it is the first day of the new *cheshbon* of actual sins. Really! Are there no sins in the four intervening days between Yom Kippur and Sukos?

What if there are sins in those intervening days? Do they get recorded? It certainly looks like the Midrash is explaining a *passuk* in the Torah saying that they aren't counted! Why not!

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Furthermore, why would the Torah include this gloomy prediction in the *passuk* about the joy of performing the *mitzvah* of the four species!

Perhaps something else is going on here. There is certainly much enthusiasm and inspiration involved in preparing for these *mitzvos* of Sukos. As long as there is still time to prepare, there is room for more enthusiasm. But when the time comes to fulfill the *mitzvah*, and the preparations are over, it is possible that there is a letdown. There could be some disappointment and frustration, regret and burnout. Indeed, all of this can lead to a lack of enthusiasm in the performance of the *mitzvah* itself. There might even be a tinge of sadness. One might feel that he did not prepare so well. He might worry that he cannot fulfill it as well as the next fellow. "My *sukkah* is not so nice." "The cakes I baked are just not as good as those made by the lady next door." "The smell of her food so overpowers mine!" "My *esrog* isn't so *mehudar*!" Not to mention general laziness that comes with resting after frenzied activity. It could happen that one does not get into the mood and cannot celebrate and perform the *mitzvah* with joy. The Torah says one needs to perform the *mitzvos* *בשמחה*, enthusiastically and with joy. *של מצוה*

As the Torah also says in the passage *תחת אשר לא עבדת את ד' אלוקיך* of reproof You did not serve with *לובב* *בשמחה* and *בבטוב* joy! Service must be done with joy. If

one fulfills a *mitzvah* without joy, if he performs it with some laziness or worse, resentment and regret, there is a *cheshbon* of sins. *Cheshbon* does not only mean an accounting of the actual sins. It also refers to the way the sin was committed. It can even refer to the way a *mitzvah* was performed, if it was performed wrong. One must account for the service element of his *mitzvah* performance. A *mitzvah* performed without joy can be counted .in the *cheshbon* of sins

People give *tzedakah* to the poor in different ways. Someone might give a lot of money with a sour face and complaining. He demoralizes the recipient. He causes him shame and pain and humiliation. How could this be considered *tzedakah*? Another person gives little, but with compassion, with a smile and with an encouraging word. He receives the pauper with joy and a pleasant countenance. This is *tzedakah* in the purest form. We know how to compare the *mitzvos* of the two. Now compare the *cheshbon* of the two! The same applies to the joy of *mitzvah* performance.

During the four days between Yom Kippur and Sukos, nobody could be held accountable for not being joyful. It isn't Yom Tov. The time has not yet come for the *mitzvos* of the four species and of *sukkah*, of pouring water on the altar and of walking around with the willow. Besides, he is busy, preoccupied with preparing these *mitzvos* and getting ready for Yom

Tov. Preoccupation with preparing for these mitzvos, by definition, entails enthusiasm. Enthusiasm means one feels encouraged and excited, and there is probably joy as well.

But on the First Day – the first day of *cheshbon* of the joy of *mitzvah* performance... this is the first day

when one starts counting the new year's *simcha shel mitzvah* – or lack thereof. שְׁמַחֲתָא מִצְוָה You shall rejoice! Let's see whether your mitzvah performance will begin a new *cheshbon* of sins. Or whether you can rise to the occasion and get excited and happy with the *mitzvos*.

## Rabbi Binyomin Bauman



### The Connection Between the Mitzvos of Sukkos

Over the course of Sukkos we engage in numerous mitzvos. Of course, we have the mitzvah of Sukkah: to dwell in a temporary structure with a roof punctured by gaps, and also the mitzvah of the four species, the lulav, esrog, hadassim and aravos. Additionally, there is another mitzvah, the mitzvah to be happy on Yom Tov. These three mitzvos are all performed on the Yom Tov of Sukkos. Are they three independent mitzvos, or could there be an underlying connection between all three? If they are connected, what could that connection be? Let us now explore all three mitzvos and see if and how they are connected.

The first mitzvah we'll discuss is the mitzvah of Simcha, being happy over

the whole Yom Tov. The Vilna Gaon said about this mitzvah that it is one of the hardest mitzvos to fulfill because it is very hard to be happy for seven days straight. Many things can arise and potentially knock one's joy off kilter, giving opportunities for one's happiness to diminish. How does one go about this 7-day-joyfest? Is there a way to make it easier?

The next mitzvah is the mitzvah of Sukkah, when we go out of our permanent dwelling and enter into a flimsy, ramshackle hut that does not even have a proper roof. We are to try and live in the sukkah as much as we are able, to the same extent as our permanent houses. The Tur (Orach Chaim 625) wants to know why we live in a sukkah in the month

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of Tishrei and not in Nissan—after all, the sukkah commemorates the sukkos which Hashem gave us in the desert when we left Egypt, which was in Nissan? He explains that Nissan is a time when it gets warmer outside and other people set up shelters outside to enjoy the nice weather. Tishrei, on the other hand, is a time when it is getting cooler and people are going back into their houses. We sit in the sukkah in Tishrei to show that we are doing the mitzvah for Hashem's sake. But why specifically this mitzvah—don't we find other mitzvos which have to be done in a way which demonstrates that they're done solely for Hashem?

The last mitzvah is the four species. There are a couple of symbolic ideas in the four species. One is that they symbolize four types of Jews. The esrog, with its smell and taste, represents one who has Torah and mitzvos; the lulav which has taste but no smell is like one who has Torah but no mitzvos. The hadassim have smell but no taste, representing one who has mitzvos but no Torah and the aravos have no smell or taste, which is like one who has no Torah or mitzvos. Additionally, the four species represent four parts of the body. The lulav is like the spine of the body, the esrog like the heart, the hadassim like the eyes, and the aravos like the lips. What do we learn from all these references?

Perhaps we can connect everything together as follows. The mitzvah of sukkah is referenced in Psalms (27:5)

ki yitzpeneini besukko - He will hide me in His shelter." The time of Sukkos is when we literally live with Hashem, in His shelter. Living with Hashem means that we recognize that everything that happens is from Hashem and that everything He does is good. There is no other force in the world: even nature itself is a series of miracles from Hashem.

Based on this, we can now understand how these mitzvos are connected. The Sukkah itself, as we said, is Hashem's shelter. We leave our permanent dwellings and go into a flimsy hut with gaps in the roof to demonstrate our trust in Hashem for protection. And for this very reason, we sit in the sukkah in Tishrei when it is obvious to everybody that we are only doing so because Hashem wants us to do so.

With this perspective the mitzvah of simcha for seven days can actually become an easier mitzvah. When one lives in Hashem's shelter, one knows that everything is good, even things which seem bad. It is then much easier to be happy, calm, and serene.

We can argue that the mitzvah of the Four Species is connected with this as well. The Four Species represent all types of Jews. But when one lives in Hashem's shelter, there is no difference between different types of people. Every single Jew is beloved in front of Hashem, even one who unfortunately has done many sins. The Species also represent four parts of the body. When we live with the

recognition that Hashem controls everything around us, we will do our utmost to use all of body parts only in the service of Hashem.

In conclusion, one can posit that there is one underlying mitzvah on Sukkos,

namely recognizing Hashem's total control over the world. The way we practice this is by sitting in a sukkah, rejoicing for seven days, and by taking the Four Species in our hands.

## Rabbi Binyomin Bauman

### Simchas Torah—the Joy of a New Beginning

The Rama, in Ohr Hachaim 669, tells us that on Simchas Torah one should celebrate with a feast in honor of completing the Torah. The source for this is a Midrash which tells how, after Hashem gave Shlomo Hamelech --King Solomon -- incredible wisdom, Shlomo brought korbanos to Hashem and made a grand celebration for all his servants. The Midrash continues by saying that we learn from here that we make a feast in honor of finishing the Torah.

Yet when one thinks about it, there is a difference between Shlomo Hamelech acquiring his exceptional wisdom through a tremendous gift from Hashem and us who need to toil and exert ourselves to properly understand anything. And when we finish learning something through our sweat and toil, there is most definitely reason to celebrate, possibly

even more so. How, then, can we use Shlomo Hamelech as the source that we should celebrate?

Rav Shimon Schwab explains that this is really is no question at all. If we were to view a siyum, a completion of a section of Torah, merely as a conclusion, then there is no comparison and it would be impossible to learn from Shlomo Hamelech. But it can be suggested that completing a portion of the Torah is not really the true simcha, the joy behind the celebration. Rather the simcha at a siyum is the fact that we can now go back over what we previously learned and gain new understanding, and new insights. One can learn through all five books of the Torah and then go back and learn something new the next time. One can learn Rashi's commentary and go back and gain a fresh insight into

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an old concept. Whether Mishnayos, Gemara, Halacha, or any other area of Torah study, there is never a shortage of new things to learn, infusing his previous Torah learning with new and fresh ideas. Even if one does not actually learn something totally new, he will get a better understanding of material which he previously thought incomprehensible. This, says Rav Schwab, is the simcha of completing the Torah: we can now return to what we have learned and learn things anew, gaining new insights along the way. In that sense, it is quite similar to Shlomo Hamelech, who after acquiring his tremendous wisdom, was able to understand things on a

new level.

According to this idea, the main point of Simchas Torah is not completing the Torah. Rather, it is the moment when we begin learning Bereishis again. We can now learn Bereishis again with a new clarification and understanding. In fact, when the Tur mentions this concept of making a feast on Simchas Torah, he says it is honor of “finishing the Torah and beginning it.” The reason we celebrate is because we restart the Torah. May we take this simcha of Simchas Torah and propel ourselves to new heights in our Torah studies.