



יום כיפור-שמיני עצרת
Yom Kippur-Shemini Atzeret

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CONNECTING THE DOTS RABBI AVI HOCHMAN

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MEIR LANNER ('23)

MAIA PUROW ('21)

AVICHAH SHEKHTER ('22)

SHOSHANA STANDLAN ('22)

Whenever we learn Torah, we always love finding connections between different parts of our learning, whether we find a connection between two similar words in two different pesukim or a connection between

one parsha and the next. These connections are far from coincidental. Therefore, is it possible we can find a connection between Yom Kippur and the upcoming holiday of Sukkot?

The Torah tells us:

בַּסֹּכֹת תֵּשְׁבוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כָּל הָאֶזְרָח בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשֵׁב
בַּסֹּכֹת. לְמַעַן יֵדְעוּ דֹרֹתֵיכֶם כִּי בַסֹּכֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם

“You shall live in booths seven days; all citizens in Israel shall live in booths. In order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in booths (sukkot) when I brought them out of the land of Egypt...” (Va-

yikra 23:42-43).

The Gemara Sukkah (11B) with the teaching of Rabbi Eliezer understands that the sukkot the Torah is referring to here are the *ananei hakavod* -- the Clouds of Glory with which Hashem enveloped the Jewish nation during their 40 years in the desert. These clouds provided serious “climate control” (something we could use in Florida during Sukkot!) and heat when necessary at night.

Based upon this gemara, a famous question is asked: Why do we celebrate Sukkot after Yom Kippur? If sukkot commemorate the clouds when the Jews left Mitzrayim, shouldn't we sit in a sukkah on Pesach?! The Tur famously answers that the holiday of Sukkot is observed at the time when people are returning to their homes after the summer, and so leaving our homes to sit in a sukkah is clearly for the sake of the mitzvah as opposed to our personal comfort.

The Gra (Vilna Gaon), in his commentary Aderet Eliyahu on Shmot (34:10), suggests a fascinating answer. He suggests that since the yom tov of Sukkot is to remember Hashem's protective clouds, the Jewish nation was first in-

troduced to the clouds immediately after leaving Mitzrayim. However, when Bnei Yisrael committed the sin of the Golden Calf (on the 17th of Tammuz) Hashem withdrew the clouds and His benevolent protection from the people.

It was only after Hashem pronounced **סלחתי כדברך** -- "I have forgiven them according to your words" (Bamidbar 14:20) on the 10th of Tishrei (Yom Kippur), and after the people responded enthusiastically and generously with their wealth and willingness to fulfill the commandment to construct the Mishkan, that the clouds returned.

When the clouds returned it was miraculous! The clouds did not only return, but they were much greater in size. Prior to their sin, the clouds enveloped only the righteous members of the nation, they now provided protection to all.

It is for this reason that Sukkot is celebrated in the fall, as we are reliving the experience of the second set of *ananei hakavod* that appeared in the fall, following Yom Kippur, not the first set that arrived in the spring.

What we find here is something remarkable. After Bnei Yisrael did teshuva and Hashem forgave them, the relationship between Hashem and the people was not only restored, but improved and enhanced.

The fact that Sukkot follows Yom Kippur is not coincidental. Sukkot serves as an annual symbol and testimony of not only our renewed relationship with Hashem, but our improved one.

May we all merit a Gmar Chatima Tovah, combined with a strengthened and expanded relationship with Hashem.

IN AN INSTANT

MEIR LANNER ('23)

Since we fast on Yom Kippur, every year we have a big meal before it starts and instead of going to Mincha and straight into Maariv from there, we recite Mincha before we eat the pre-Yom Kippur meal. The Shemoneh Esrei we say throughout Yom Kippur includes the section of Viduy, which is where we confess our sins to Hashem. When it comes to most Yamim Tovim, we start saying these special insertions at Maariv of the first night, but when it comes to Yom Kippur we start saying the special prayers of the day, including Viduy, at Min-

cha before Yom Kippur even starts! You might ask, why do we say Mincha before we eat, and why do we add the Viduy insertions at that point, before Maariv?

The gemara states that the reason we recite Mincha before we eat is because we might choke at the meal, and then we would not get the chance to say Viduy even once and we would miss out on receiving forgiveness from Hashem. However, this sounds like a highly improbable concern, since the actual chances of choking on food and dying at the pre-Yom Kippur meal are very small. We all eat meals every day of our lives, multiple times, and we've gotten pretty good at it. Why are we so worried all of a sudden about dying during that meal?

The gemara's answer to this is deep and incredibly insightful about the mindset of a person during Yom Kippur. We don't think about it too often, but it's kind of crazy how quickly we can go from being perfectly healthy to being sick. We are so lucky to be alive and healthy and we can't take a second of our life for granted.

The gemara tells us to daven Mincha with Viduy before eating on Erev Yom Kippur as a reminder that we can go from life to death in a moment, so we have to appreciate how lucky we are and appreciate Hashem for letting us be healthy, safe, and alive.

LESS IS MORE

MAIA PUROW ('21)

Shemini Atzeret is a very strange holiday. I guarantee if I were to ask a random friend about the holiday of Shemini Atzeret they would stare at me with a blank face. I wouldn't blame them because Shemini Atzeret is, in fact, bereft of any unique mitzvot or minhagim. It is part of a cycle of holidays that contain a plethora of mitzvot. On Rosh Hashanah we get to dip our apples in honey and hear the majestic sound of the shofar. On Yom Kippur we fast and wear white to signify purity. Sukkot gets the wonderful mitzvah of eating in a hut and shaking a *lulav* and magical *etrog* in every direction possible. Immediately following Shemini Atzeret, we celebrate Simchat Torah, where we endlessly rejoice over reading the Torah. However, sandwiched in between all of these holidays is Shemini Atzeret, a holiday which seems to lack a unique identity and ritual. On the eighth day of Sukkot (Shemini Atzeret), Hashem decided to take away the mitzvah of eating in a sukkah and the shaking of the *lulav* and *etrog*, so the holiday lacks any special mitzvah. Why is that?

The answer to this question is very simple, but profound at the same time. Shemini Atzeret is so special *because* it is devoid of any special mitzvot and customs. True happiness is contained within ourselves, an idea which is supported by Kohelet (5:9): אִהְבֵּה כֶסֶף לֹא-יִשְׂבַע כֶּסֶף, “one who loves money will never be satisfied with money.” To be truly happy, a person must find happiness without all the material gifts which are given to him.

Mitzvot are supposed to be gifts from Hashem to help us achieve a stronger bond and connection with Hashem, but they are not the final steps to achieve spiritual elevation. Rather, we must be able to feel close and connected to Hashem even without relying on additional mitzvot to help us get there.

As we step away from the holiday season and return to our daily lives, (back to tests and early mornings!) we begin to feel emptiness. Where are all our additional mitzvot and the happy emotions from the high holidays? What are we going to do without dancing with the Torah and hearing the shofar all year long? We need and love these joyous mitzvot and customs! But, we do not need to always have *chagim* to be in the holiday spirit. Shemini Atzeret is the model for how we can live the rest of the year once the holidays are over. It teaches us how we can bring the spirit of the holidays into our daily lives. Shemini Atzeret is all about recognizing that we have gained so much from the mitzvot and the *chagim* that we now know how to achieve happiness even without turning every day into a *chag*. The Jewish people can achieve this elevated spiritual level on a daily basis in our regular lives even without the additional rituals of the holidays by channeling the spiritual growth we achieved from the holidays and powering it into our daily lives.

VULNERABLE PROTECTION

AVICHAJ SHEKHTER ('22)

Most of us have probably built our sukkot to use for the *chag* or are using ones that others have built, but why are we commanded to build them at all? The Torah tells us that it is in commemoration of the sukkot we dwelled in on our way from Mitzrayim to Eretz Yisrael.

בְּסֹכֹת תִּשְׁבוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כָּל הָאֶזְרָח בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל

יִשְׁבוּ בְּסֹכֹת. לְמַעַן יֵדְעוּ דַרְתֵּיכֶם כִּי בְּסֹכֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי

אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם

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tions may know that I made the Israelite people live in booths (sukkot) when I brought them out of the land of Egypt...” (Vayikra 23:42-43).

There’s one problem, though. The rest of the time that the Torah talks about Bnei Yisrael in the desert, it never mentions them living in sukkot. The gemara records a disagreement between R’ Akiva and R’ Eliezer about the nature of just what the actual sukkot in the desert were. R’ Eliezer holds that the sukkot refer to the *ananei hakavod*, the Clouds of Glory. R’ Akiva holds that they were actual sukkot that the Jews lived in. This leaves us with a big question—is the sukkah commemorating the literal huts the Jewish people lived in in the desert or the *ananei hakavod* that sheltered them?

Surprisingly, it’s probably both! But what’s the point of remembering what it was like to live in huts? On top of that, what’s the point of remembering being sheltered by Hashem’s cloud? Do we really need both? Why not just pick one?

The “*sukkah mamash*,” as it says in the gemara, is the real, literal sukkah, which is a temporary home. It doesn’t have four walls or a fully covered roof, it is easily taken down and put back up, it doesn’t give you a true shelter or security, and anyone who has spent a meal in a sukkah in Florida knows its inconveniences. When you dwell in a sukkah, you’re subject to nature and all it has to offer. At its essence, to spend time in a literal sukkah is to experience your own vulnerability. It’s to reject the idea that you have full control to live the way you want.

The cloud on the other hand is the ultimate shelter. Bnei Yisrael were safe in the desert, a place where they should have been most vulnerable, because they were under the direct protection of the *Ribono Shel Olam*. Hashem’s cloud protected them in a way a sukkah never could and defended them from their enemies, while sukkot, in contrast, are easily destroyed.

Therefore, the true meaning of Sukkot requires both Rabbi Akiva’s and Rabbi Eliezer’s interpretations. Sukkot is not just about vulnerability or protection, but a recognition that as human beings we don’t always have the power to be in complete control, but that if we give up our need to be in control, there is “Someone else” out there taking care of us. The holiday of Sukkot is called, *Z’man Simchatenu!* A little vulnerability can be a beautiful thing.

Chag Sameach!

SOUL SEARCHING

SHOSHANA STANDLAN ('22)

When faced with the question whether one should break their fast to continue davening if they feel weak or to go home, lay in bed, and continue the fast, the Rabbis say to go home and keep fasting, as fasting is actually an essential part of the day. This is the opposite of what one would normally expect. Isn't Yom Kippur about confessing our sins and doing teshuva in a community setting? Why should we sacrifice the davening aspect in favor of keeping the fast?

To fully answer this question we must look back at other mentions of fasting. Throughout Tanach it is common to fast in mourning or in the midst of a harsh decree. In Megillat Esther, all the Jews throughout Persia fasted and wept after the decree of Haman. In the book of Yoel, there is a declaration for a fast day to mourn the destruction of the land. Similarly, on Yom Kippur, by abstaining from drinking and eating, we are essentially mourning the afflictions on our soul, mourning our sins, and hoping to change the harsh decrees bestowed upon us. The self-affliction of fasting is a sign to Hashem that we recognize our transgressions and are distraught over them, and only then can we ask Him to rip up any evil decrees and be forgiven.

This explanation is very plausible, but one could counter by saying that when they are fasting they are thinking about their hunger and not undergoing deep self reflection. Even if this is not the case, it's possible to mourn and do teshuvah for our sins through davening. So the question still stands: why does fasting takes precedence over davening?

Rabbi Moishe New of Montreal offers an incredible answer to this frequently asked question. He explains that the deeper meaning of this day is telling our physical body that the essence of who we are is our soul and Yom Kippur is all about our soul. This is the soul day, where we are focused solely on the cleansing of our tainted souls. In fact, Rabbi New states that we are *supposed* to feel this hunger, emphasizing that our body is not the primary, but our soul makes us who we are. That is not to say we should deny our body the needed sustenance on every other day. Rather, this denial of food illustrates that the physical world by itself is insignificant. Only once Hashem is incorporated into the physical world does it become significant. Therefore, we achieve the goal of this soul day, to come before Hashem as souls, through the action of fasting. In this way the fasting takes precedence over the davening

May everyone have a safe and meaningful fast and really focus on the purpose of the day. When we become hungry, we understand that fasting is our way of demonstrating to the body that we are not defined by our physical bodies but by our souls.
G'mar Chatimah Tovah!

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