



Sukkot



English version

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## THE ART OF BEING PROTECTED

On Yom Kippur, I felt I needed a sign, a.s.a.p. from G-d, to tell me what I should be working on for the year. I opened the Sefer in front of me, a Sefer that has in it four Sifrei Mussar: Messilat Yesharim, Orhot Tzaddikim, Shaarei Teshuva and Tomer Devorah. The page opened up to the first page of Shaar Hasimha in Orhot Tzaddikim: the importance of serving G-d out of happiness. I knew that this is what I need to work on for life, as this is what my Rabbi has told me. But now, I felt that G-d was telling me to listen to my Rabbi more closely. To be happy with my service of G-d, to be happy with what I have and what I do.

The holiday of Sukkot is the holiday in which we are actually *commanded* to be happy, even though we are held accountable to do *all* of our mitzvot out of happiness. פְּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עֲבַדְתָּ אֶת-יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב לֵבָב מְרֹב כָּל הַיּוֹם: What is special about the Mitzvah of Sukkot, then, that we are told to be happy?

I had a hard time getting the fingers to the keyboard, as my hands are busy building a Sukkah and checking Etrogim. But always, when I get a chance to write, ideas flow from Above. Here is one of them: If you are not smiling, it means that you are lacking Emunah. And your body expresses this, via body language. How? Your smile is shaped upward at the edges, to display that you believe, that you realize, that you are just a Kli, a vessel, ready to accept from G-d whatever He sends. That you are protected in life, and not because you protect yourself. If you are frowning,

the edge of the lips face downward, as if you are, subconsciously, displaying that you are protected, only because you protect yourself.

Immediately after High Holidays, when we ask G-d to grant us life itself, we realize that all that we have is G-d given. The holiday of Sukkot is the holiday when we show G-d that we realize that we cannot protect ourselves: only You can protect me.

I leave my house, my roof, my luxurious lifestyle, and I go out to a place where I am exposed to the elements of nature. Sun, rain, bees, mosquitos, flies, cats, hot, cold, and in Yerushalyim, where the Sukkot are back to back, the snoring neighbor. I am dependent on You, G-d. For You, G-d, are מֶלֶךְ עוֹזֵר, You are the Kind One Who Helps me fight my life's challenges, Who saves me, because I can't save myself. And, Who protects me, because I can't protect myself.

With current events the way they are, the "N" word-threat thrown across the Atlantic, we really have nothing that we can do to protect ourselves from a Nuclear Armageddon. How can we be happy? When people face health issues, adolescence issues, financial issues, marital issues and they have no way to protect themselves, how do they stay happy? If the most probable situation is that when you fight, you lose, how can we be happy in this state of helplessness?

The answer is, you were never in control, you were never protected, *because* you protected yourself. *You were protected because G-d protected you.*



Forty years in the Desert, a nation of over 3 Million could never, ever, protect themselves!

So, G-d commands each and every אָזְרָה, each person who is a citizen, who feels like he is settled, to feel unsettled for a bit. בְּסֻכּוֹת תֵּשְׁבוּ שְׁבַעַת יָמִים: To leave his home and enter his Sukkah. We are commanded in this holiday not only to be happy, but to make those who most probably feel helpless and hopeless to be happy, as well. וְשִׂמְחָתָם בְּמִסְכָּה אֶתָּה וּבִנְיָהּ וּבְיָתֶיךָ וְעַבְדֶּיךָ: Those who are dependent on you, like your son and daughter, your slave and maidservant, the Levi who has no inheritance, the convert, the orphan and the widow. People who help those who can't help themselves are those who believe that G-d takes care of them. People who are always worried about protecting themselves can't be bothered with protecting others.

As much as you *think* that you can protect yourself, you can never protect yourself forever. Life goes by so fast. We are supposed to learn Kohelet on these days of Sukkot, as Kohelet tells us about the emptiness of *external* and *material* happiness, לְשִׁחֹק אֶמְרָתִי מְהֻלָּל וְלִשְׂמֹחָה מֵחַיֵּי עֵשָׂה: Allow me to share with you a Midrash in Kohelet. At one year old, a person is compared to a king: he is put in a cradle, and everyone is hugging and kissing him. Two and three year-olds are compared to a pig, that gets himself all dirty and sticks his hands in the toilet. At ten, a person is like a goat, as he jumps all over. A twenty-year-old is like a horse, standing tall, making himself look as good as he can, as he tries to find a wife. He gets married, and then, he is like a donkey, as he readies himself to carry the family load. His hairline goes up, belly goes down. He has kids, and now he is brazen like a dog,

looking for bread and food to provide for his family, always sniffing out investment opportunities and new streams of income. He gets older, and he becomes like a monkey. Look at the old man's shoulders. He tries to copy the youth, but he can't. Out of all the Creation, the only creature who gets white hair when they get old is us humans. There is no going back in life. But this is all by the simple people. The Ben Torah, on the other hand, even when he becomes old, he stays king, as it says, וְהַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד זָקֵן, (Kohelet Rabbah 1;2) That's all, folks. That's life, in a nutshell.

You can't protect yourself from old age, unless you learn and live Torah, and instead of ending life like a monkey, you end life like a king.

Sukkot is the holiday, that ironically falls out in Tishrei, in fall, and not in spring, in Nissan, when we actually left Egypt and were surrounded by clouds of glory. Because this holiday, which was predetermined 974 generations before G-d created the world, was intended to be in fall. Fall in Israel, agriculturally, is the time when the silos are full. It is a time to feel that we are protected, and because we protect ourselves... We have silos of grain, cellars of wine, and enough oil, to survive anything. This haughtiness is what brings to the worst, as we see in the second chapter of Shema, that abundance is a perfect recipe for heresy. Immediately after וְאָכַלְתָּ וּשְׂבַעְתָּ, And you will eat, and you will be satiated – then, we need to be careful not to go and serve idols. And as Moshe rebuked, that the sin of the Golden Calf was caused because of דִּי זָהָב. Too much gold.

So go out of your house, out of your protection for seven days, look up at the stars through the Schach, and realize that you are protected, because G-d protects you. Not because you protect yourself.

## THE POWER TO BE HAPPY

Built into Judaism is a life-long workshop that prepares us to become superhuman beings. From nursery to nursing home, Judaism teaches us patience and trains us to delay self-gratification. It teaches you to wait 6 hours between meat and milk, to avoid relationships with the other gender until you find your spouse. To hold off work until you learned something after morning prayers.

Judaism teaches us that life is more important than the most important things, like keeping Shabbat, fasting on Yom Kippur, or attending synagogues.

Judaism teaches admittance on our High Holidays. On Rosh Hashana, Judaism teaches us Who is Boss, that we are powerless, that there is a Power that is greater than ourselves, and that the most

extraordinary people are those who are most humble. On Yom Kippur, it teaches us to forgive, to forget, and let go. To make lists to all we harmed and to make amends. To admit to ourselves, G-d, and others, and fix broken relationships, no matter how broken they are, or how long.

Judaism teaches emotional intelligence on Sukkot. וְשִׂמְחָתָהּ בְּתַגְּבָהּ... וְהִתִּיב אֶף שִׂמְחָה It challenges us to be happy, to rejoice, no matter what challenges us. Your emotions are your choice, to be aware and take control of how you feel, and to be resiliently happy. Happiness is a multi-billion-dollar industry, and 99% of happiness being 'sold' is fake happiness. Judaism teaches us the secrets to happiness twice a year Sukkot teaches that real happiness is not what you have, but what type of person you are and how you perceive your world.

There are three relationships in the world. Between Man and G-d, Man and others, Man and himself. All happiness and sadness emotions exist in between that space between those relationships. Happier people have better relationships, and sadder people have worse relationships. Judaism teaches that the key to happiness is to improve relationships. This is why both on Purim and Sukkot, the times we are to be happy and rejoice, the Mitzvoth of the day revolve around these three relationships. On Purim, we read Megillah, give Mishloah Manot, Matanot LaEvyonim, and enjoy a Purim feast. On Sukkot, we eat lavish meals in the Succah, sit with G-d, invite others, dance with them, and buy our loved ones present before the holiday. We realize how little we need to be happy, and how G-d does not ask a lot from us, to consider that we are doing a lot. Sitting in the Succah, shaking Lulav and Etrog, is equal to doing 613 Mitzvoth, each! (Rokeach; Piyut of R Klir)

If you rejoice during Succot, you will have the power to be happy all year long. Not including holidays, there are 348 days in the year. The Torah commands us to rejoice on Succot, and then וְהִייתָ אֶף שִׂמְחָה. The word שמחה is the numerical equivalent to 348 because if you are happy on Succot, you will obtain the power of happiness for the rest of the year. How so?

On Succot, we invite the Patriarchs and greatest men of our nation to sit with us in the Succah, and we reconnect with our rich heritage. With Avraham, Yitzhak, Yaakov, the men who we refer to as "Yesharim." Yesharim, "straight hearted," is a key to happiness, as we say during Kol Nidrei before Shehehyanu of Yom Kippur, אֲוֹר זָרַע לְצַדִּיק וְלִישָׁרֵי-לֵב שִׂמְחָה: A light is sown for the righteous, and for the straightforward of heart, joy. (Tehillim 97;11) To be happy, you need to have a straightforward heart. What does that mean, a straightforward heart? We know that Bereshit's book is referred to as Sefer Hayashar, for the Patriarchs were all straightforward. G-d, Himself, is referred to as א-ל אמונה ואין עול צדיק וישר הוא. G-d Himself is righteous and straightforward. What does it mean to be straightforward, and how does that bring about happiness?

The word ישר at its root is straightforwardness or seeing through with one thought from the beginning to the end, not diverting attention, losing focus. It is the power that our Forefathers used to become who they became and pass the tests they passed. At the age of three, Avraham realized that the world has a Creator, Who is continuously leading Nature. But it was not until the age of 40 that Avraham recognized G-d. What did Avraham do from 3 until 40?

From age 3 to 40, Avraham was going straight in thought, single-mindedly and mindful of His Creator. He first realized that there is a Creator, and did not stop there... "If there is a Creator, One who leads Nature and gives me all that I have... I can have a relationship with Him! I can pray to Him, and He will answer me! The way I can have a relationship is to learn from His ways, His kindness, and follow Him!" And from that clear thinking, Avraham became the kindest person ever to walk the face of the Earth. With the power of mindfulness and focused thought, Avraham was able to fathom the laws of the Torah and keep them. פְּקֻדֹתַי יִקְנוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִשְׁמֵחֵי-לֵב. *The orders of the L-rd are straightforward, causing the heart to rejoice.* What does this mean?

A straightforward Jew does not stay the same Jew at 40 as he was at 3. In a straight direction, he progresses to the goal of connecting with his

Creator, and Olam Haba. When a person has direction, when a person is progressing, this brings happiness. According to their strengths and virtues, each of our forefathers went straight, each in their unique way, to bring about G-dliness in this world. This is G-d's way, to be Yashar, א-ל אמונה ואין עול צדיק וישר הוא. He does not stop, He keeps bringing the world closer to its purpose, and He keeps getting you closer to your purpose.

This mindfulness of straightforward thinking is the elementary step to humility. (Malbim) If you want to access humility, you need to keep focus. As Mordechai Shapiro sings in his new song, *“You think you got it under control, you are on a roll, living it up, living your dreams. But when it all goes bust at the seams, then you scream and cry, to the One on high... He’s been there from the beginning when you felt like you were winning. He was calling all the shots; He gave you all that you’ve got. So when your low, just you know, He is up above and down below, so shout it out aloud... Ein Od Milvado!”* It is so hard to keep thinking straight, when you are winning. You forget where you came from, and you follow all the people who are not straight, the people running after social status, wealth, fancy cars, vacations, brand names, honor, respect, and fame. But then you ask, Hey! I am not happy! My family is not happy! What is wrong?

This is the message of Succot, כַּל־הַאֲזָרָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁבּוּ, בַּסֻּכּוֹת. No matter where you are in life, how rich you are ... get into a temporary Succah! Realize that G-d gave you another year just a few days ago, and He wants you to remember Who took you from zero to hero, and Who gave you a roof, A/C, and heat. He wants you to focus on the message of the Succah: this world is temporary, and a distraction to the straight line to the permanent world to come. When you reframe your life perspective in this way, you obtain happiness by default, as you are straight in line with your life's purpose.

### THE POWER OF BEING PRESENT

According to Judaism, you do not need to **do** something, get something, or have something, to become happy. To be happy, according to Judaism, you need to **undo** things,

### Selfie Steps to Happiness

1. All unhappiness is a result of a lack. Lack of acceptance; hope; faith; courage; honesty; patience; humility; loving others; integrity; self-discipline or lack of serving your Creator. Realize what you are lacking, and fix that. G-d makes us happy creatures at the core, but we tend to confuse ourselves. עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹקִים אֶת־הָאָדָם יָשָׁר וְתַמָּה לְבָבוֹ for *God made man straight, but they sought many calculations. (Kohelet 7;29)*
2. Work on all three relationship types. When one of the three relationships are hurting for too long, it will reflect in one or both of the other two types.
3. Want nothing more than simplicity. Stop the happiness trap of running after happiness. Instead, learn humility and acceptance, and learn to discover meaning in life and satisfaction in the small things.
4. Pay attention to your strengths, and don't focus on what you perceive as weakness. Try to remember and savor the good times and memories and look past the times and memories that make you suffer and disrupt your sense of calm. Adopt an optimistic look at life. Problems are not as permanent, pervasive, or personal as we tend to make them.
5. Be kind to your family, friends, and neighbors. And most importantly, be kind to yourself.
6. Stick to your life's goals, the life you desire, and the self-actualization you aspire for.

like anger, jealousy, damaged pride or damaged relationships. To **undo** helplessness, hopelessness, doubt, all-or-nothing thinking, expectations or “should” thoughts. To stay in the present, give the

present emotion a label, and live the moment's emotion to its fullest.

There are only 51 days, twice a year, the “make it” or “break it” days—the 51 days from Pesach until Shavuoth, and the 51 days from Rosh Hodesh Elul until Simchat Torah. We pray, in Hallel, אָנָּה יְיָ יִקְוֶה הוֹשִׁיעֵה נָּא אֶתְנוּ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְנִשְׁמְחֵה נָּא אִתְּנוּ. Please YKVK, Save us now. Please, YKVK, Make us successful, now. The word נָּא means now. But in the numerical meaning, it means 51. We ask that the 51 days make the effect they can, and bring us salvation and success. It is now, or never, as we sing when we dance with the Torah, שְׂמַחוּ נָּא שְׂמַחוּ נָּא בְּשִׂמְחַת הַתּוֹרָה. *Rejoice now, rejoice now, with the happiness of the Torah!*

The daughter of R Meir from Parmishlan became sick on Sukkot and deathly ill on Simhat Torah. During the Hakafot, R Meir behaved like his custom, to rejoice, dance and sing, with his whole heart. His students asked him what to do about his daughter, what advice he has to bring upon her G-d's mercy and salvation.

R Meir entered his daughter's room and noticed that she was breathing her last breaths. He looked up to Heaven and prayed the following words to G-d: *Master of the World! You commanded me to blow Shofar on Rosh Hashana, so I blew Shofar on Rosh Hashana. You commanded me to fast on Yom Kippur, and I fasted on Yom Kippur. You commanded me to sit in the Sukkah over the holiday, and I sat in the Sukkah during Sukkot. You commanded me to rejoice, sing and dance, on Simhat Torah, and I did just that! And now, You made my daughter deathly ill. You commanded me to accept everything with happiness.* דַּיִב אָדָם לְבָרֵךְ עַל הַטּוֹבָה. *A person is commanded to bless G-d for the bad things in life, just as he blesses for good. So, I am also accepting this with happiness. But, Master of the World, You commanded in Your Torah אין מערבין שמחה בשמחה A person is not allowed to mix one happiness with another. (A person is not allowed to get married on Hol Hamoed, as to be totally dedicated at heart to one mitzvah at a time).*

Immediately, his daughter broke out into a sweat and cured.

This story has so many lessons in it. To me, the takeaway from the story is the power of being totally present. Physically, emotionally and spiritually. The law of אין מערבין שמחה בשמחה teaches us not to mix one happiness with another. The secret to happiness is to be living the moment to its fullest, one moment at a time. The secret to focusing during prayer is to be present with G-d. The secret to successful relationships is to be present with your loved ones. The secret to business success is to be present with the customers you serve. The secret to being a servant of G-d, and the secret of doing Mitzvot properly, is single-mindedness, focus, and being present.

*If someone rejoices, dances with his whole heart, during Simhat Torah, He is promised that his children will never leave G-d's Torah, and they will always have a connection. (Yesod VeShoresh HaAvodah, Moed Lekol Hai) Why? By dancing with the Torah, or this year, dancing in front of the Torah, you are dancing with G-d. Simhat Torah, Shemini Atzeret, is the only time of the year that G-d invites you to such a dance. Who would give up on such an opportunity?*

A while back, I received a phone call from a special woman who was frantic that her father was dying. Flooded with emotions, she did not know what to do with herself or how to cope alone with a dying father. I asked her what her father would want from her if he could speak. She said he would want her to be next to him at his last moments on this Earth, just to be present. I asked her if she could do just that, and focus on the mitzvah of honoring her father. Until today, she can't stop thanking me. Those were the most precious moments of her life. To watch as her father was passing, being present with him during his last moments on Earth, as he returned his soul to his Creator. The secret to רוגע, calmness, and being רגוע, calm, is living in the רגע, in the moment. Children are naturally happy because they live in the present. They do not worry about the future and don't let the past disturb the present's fun. As Dale Carnegie taught, all stress is either crying over spilled milk or worrying about how you will cross the bridge when you get there. In the present, everything is fine. Dale, though, was preceded by

Ibn Ezra. העבר אין והעתיד עדיין וההווה כהרף עין דאגה. *The past is gone, and the future is not yet, and the present passes like the blink of an eye. So why worry?*

פחת אשך לא-עבדת את-יְקוֹם אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב לֵבב מְרַב כָּל. All the curses of the Torah, *are because you did not serve YKVK your G-d with happiness and with a good heart, and with mostly all.* What do those seemingly redundant last words, מְרַב כָּל, from mostly all, mean? The Sefer Haredim brings from the Arizal that we are to serve G-d out of happiness, happier than all the joy one might experience, even from attaining all the gold and precious stones in the world. When you have a mitzvah to do, you need to look at the opportunity to serve Him as a present from G-d, and such a gift is more significant than all the worldly pleasures, מְרַב כָּל. Rashi explains these words that G-d gives us so much goodness. How can we not be happy that G-d is asking us to do this Mitzvah? That is why happiness in the Mitzvah is not extra credit, but it is essential and elementary in mitzvah performance. Understanding how much you are blessed and how grateful you are is basic in serving Him.

We are in the craziest time of the century. And still, G-d wants us to serve Him out of happiness. How? The word אך is the key. The numerical value of אך is 21. The air in Earth's atmosphere is made up of 78 percent nitrogen and 21 percent oxygen. The amount of percentage of oxygen you need in the air to breathe is 21 percent. Not a drop higher and not slightly lower.

It's easy to feel that G-d has no idea of what we are going through. But when you open up your Siddur,

### The Sukkot Festival – Zman Simchateinu

The Torah emphasizes that Sukkot is a joyous holiday. Indeed, it commands us not once, but twice, to be joyful on Sukkot: “Rejoice in your festival...and be totally joyous” – ושמחת בחגך...והיית; and “Rejoice before the Lord, your G-d, for seven days” – ושמחת לפני ה' אלוהיכם שבעת ימים – (*Devarim 16:14-15 & Vayikra 23:40*). Let us try to put our finger on the source of this joy, and explore

Tehillim, or Chumash, and pay attention to every word, every letter, He is with us in our difficult times, even at times we feel hopeless and helpless. When you are down, He is there with you, and when you are up, He is the One who brought you up. That is what He does, from Creation until the present, and no one does it like Him. He flips ladders, brings the top to the bottom and the bottom to the top. How so?

When Moshe blessed the tribe of Yosef, Moshe refers to G-d שְׁכֵנֵי סֻּבֹּתָי, the One who Dwells in the Thornbush. He was there for Yosef in those times, like no one else could be there with Yosef, and He will be there with you like no one else can be there for you. In Dikduk, this formality of the word Shochen, with a letter Yud at the end, שכני, is the way of saying that no one does this act as He does. Similar to the formality of the words we sing at the beginning of Hallel המגביהי, המשפילי, מקימי, להושיבי, מושיבי. G-d takes the people from the bottom and brings them to the top. Like no one else does. (See Malbim Tehillim, Bchor Shor on passuk)

When it is hard to smile, remember this. Remember that He is with you, dancing with you on Simhat Torah, as you rejoice over your relationship with Him. The words in Hallel זָה הַיּוֹם זָה הַיּוֹם עָשָׂה יְקוֹם נִגְלָה וְנִשְׂמְחָה בּוֹ mean just this. *This is the day that G-d made; let us rejoice and be happy with Him.* You can only rejoice with G-d when you recognize that He made the present as it is, and it is not just a stepping stone to tomorrow or a continuation of yesterday.

together some classical insights into the Festival of Sukkot and the mitzvah of dwelling in the sukkah.

The Talmud (*Sukkah 11b*) records an interesting difference of opinion among our great Sages about what exactly the Torah means when it tells us why we are to dwell in the sukkah on Sukkot: *For you should know throughout the generations that I placed the Jews in sukkot when I took them out of*

*Egypt. (Vayikra 23:43).* Rabbi Eliezer understood that the sukkot mentioned in the *passuk* refer to the Clouds of Glory that G-d sent to envelope and protect the Jews during their years in the desert. Rabbi Akiva, however, understood this literally as a reference to actual sukkot – similar to the temporary “huts” we use today. Although the accepted opinion is that of Rabbi Eliezer, the *Pri Megadim* writes that one should have the interpretations of both Sages in mind while fulfilling the mitzah of sukkah.

Now, we may find it a bit difficult to fully appreciate the opinion of Rabbi Akiva because the Torah itself tells us that G-d enveloped the Jews with miraculous Clouds of Glory. Why does Rabbi Akiva insist on a literal understanding?

The *Chatam Sofer* (ג'רשו"ת נ"ג) clears up the mystery by explaining that among the Jewish people were lepers and other ritually impure individuals who were disqualified from dwelling in the confines of the camp. They were the ones who dwelt in actual sukkot outside of the Clouds of Glory. Thus, the *Chatam Sofer* explains, the two opinions of our Sages can be reconciled:

On the one hand, the righteous and pure merited the Clouds of Glory. On the other hand, the lepers and other impure individuals had to suffice with actual sukkot made for them by G-d.

If we think about it, this awareness can enhance our own fulfillment of the mitzvah of sukkah. Those of us who were worthy on Yom Kippur to be cleansed and inscribed in the *Book of the Righteous* can enjoy the sukkah as it is described in the *Zohar*: to be the shade of *Emunah* (faith and trust in G-d), similar to the Clouds of Glory. But those who were less fortunate can also find joy and consolation in the sukkah. They can feel that leaving their comfortable houses and entering the sukkah is a kind of exile which will bring them the atonement that they did not merit on Yom Kippur. This is hinted at in the plural name of the festival – Sukkot – since the sukkah serves two different functions.

The *Zohar* notes that this temporary dwelling place which requires two walls and a bit of a third symbolizes an arm that is hugging (וימינו תהבקני) . It

is, symbolically, the “Arm” of G-d – the “Arm” that continues to hug us in our exile. Whether we as individuals are in symbolic exile in the sukkah, or whether we as a nation are in exile and Diaspora, we still can bring G-d’s Glory into our lives. Indeed, G-d treasures our ability to remain joyous as we retain a permanent relationship with Him despite the constantly changing conditions and lack of permanence of Jewish life in Exile. G-d loves us as we project to ourselves and others that the Jew’s happiness is not due to wealth or material luxury. Rather, it is our ability to sit in the sukkah together with our ancestors, and connect to a pleasure in life that luxury cannot offer: the pleasure of being in G-d’s shade, and following Him throughout difficult times. It is no coincidence that in the end of days, G-d will refute the gentiles’ claim of loyalty to G-d by testing them specifically with the mitzvah of sukkah. For only a Jew has the ability to remain close to G-d despite difficulty and exile.

This is because he appreciates that there is no greater pleasure than being close to G-d. As Rabbi Noach Weinberg *zt”l* explained, this pleasure is greater than the other four types of pleasures available to man, beginning with sensual pleasure – such as steak, luxury cars, good music. It is greater than the pleasure of love – such as love for a child or a spouse. (The sensual level of pleasure is the lowest on the list. One would not give up even one unit of this pleasure of love such as giving up a child for all the sensual pleasures in the world.) It is greater than the pleasure derived from a cause. (A cause is a higher level of pleasure than love. People are willing to do so much for a cause – sometimes even at the expense of their loved ones.) It is even greater than the pleasure of creativity – such as creating a family or a new concept.

Beyond all these worldly pleasures is the pleasure of having a relationship with G-d, and recognizing and appreciating that He is the source of all we have, and has always been our Savior and Protector. Rabbi Weinberg noted that it is difficult to tap into this pleasure while running after the pleasures of the senses.

Under the leaves of the *schach* (sukkah roof) and the blue sky, the Jew can readily feel this pleasure

of a relationship with his Creator. Out of his comfortable home, inside his humble sukkah abode, the Jew can tap into this unsurpassable pleasure which brings unlimited happiness. It is a relationship that even an exile of 2,000 years cannot diminish.

Inside the sukkah, we sense that we are in a different world. We are in a world where the pleasure of G-d's presence is tangible, and can be felt as more pleasurable than all worldly possessions. We project this joy during the time of plenty and harvest, and thereby fortify ourselves for the upcoming journey through the long, cold winter ahead.

## Post Script

### *ARBA'AT HA'MINIM:*

#### *THE FOUR SPECIES AS SYMBOLS*

Sometimes we are so busying doing *mitzvot* that we do not have enough time to delve into their deeper meaning or symbolic significance. Since we find ourselves now just before the Festival of Sukkot, I would like to explore with you some of the secrets of the Four Species that we wave during the Festival. Did you know that the Four Species hint at all 613 mitzvot of the Torah? We see this in the numerical value of the etrog (610), coupled with the three other Species – lulav, hadassim, and aravot.  $610 + 3 = 613$ . Looked at another way, the Four Species hint at the Seven Heavens: one etrog, one lulav, three hadassim, and two aravot.  $1 + 1 + 3 + 2 = 7$ . With these seven mitzvah items, we can pierce the Seven Heavens with our prayers!

The etrog is used as a *segulah* for easy childbirth (אלף המגן' סי' תר"ס סי'). This is how it works: A pregnant woman nearing childbirth takes an etrog which had been used for the mitzvah of the Four Species, and bites off the *pitom* (after Hoshana Rabba). She then says: "Master of the Universe, Chava ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge – the etrog – and brought upon humanity death and birth pangs! Master of the Universe, just as I refrained from eating of the etrog during the days of Sukkot while the mitzvah was being done with it, I would

In the Land of Israel, the Festival of Sukkot falls during the harvest. A successful harvest can easily swell the ego of the individual gathering in so much bounty. Thus, the Rashbam tells us, we leave our sturdy houses for a flimsy sukkah specifically at this time of year in order to humble ourselves (*Vayikra* 23:23). We are to remember that there was a time when our nation dwelled in the desert in simple huts. And we are to remember that it is not our strength that gave us our wealth, but rather the kindness of G-d. This awareness only strengthens our feeling of closeness to the One who provides for all of our needs, always.

have also refrained from eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Please accept my prayer that neither I nor my child get hurt during childbirth..."

There is another level of symbolism to the Four Species, this one connected with four important organs of the human body. The lulav symbolizes the spine; the etrog – the heart; the hadassim – the eyes; and the aravot – the lips. This is one reason we are especially careful about purchasing a beautiful etrog, with not even a small part missing (*chaser*). A pure heart, a 100% feeling heart, is indispensable in our quest for self-perfection. By controlling all four of these key parts of the body, and doing *teshuvah* with them over the forty days leading up to Yom Kippur, we hope to merit a successful new year. We do *teshuvah* by bending over (bending the spine) while banging on our heart and confessing our sins with our lips in *viduy*. *Teshuvah* is done by a regretful heart, and eyes that perceive clearly, but don't wander where they shouldn't. Our lips both verbalize how we wronged G-d and man, and also control what we say and how we say what we must.

Incidentally, it is not surprising that the etrog – symbolic of the heart – was the fruit of the Tree of



Knowledge since the Torah calls the heart the place of one's knowledge, as in the expressions: *binat ha'lev* and *chacham lev*.

The custom of circling the *bimah* – *hakafot* – has several levels of significance. On the simple level, it is intended to remind us of the circling around the Altar in the Temple. But the circle also symbolizes that which is eternal and never-ending – unlike the line, which has a beginning and an end. When we make our circular *hakafot* with the *Sefer Torah* on Simchat Torah, we are saying that the Torah itself is eternal and never-ending. In a similar way, the (Ashkenazi) custom of the bride circling the groom under the *chupah* symbolizes a relationship and love between husband and wife that is to be never-ending. The wife will always be there for the husband, and the husband will look at no other woman. Indeed, the *hakafot* on Sukkot also hint at our permanent relationship with our “Groom” who is always there to save us and bring about our salvation.

Whether we need G-d to send rain (which we pray for while holding the Four Species which require a great deal of water to grow) or whether we need G-d to help us do *teshuvah*, He is there for us eternally. He never fails us. He never looks to other nations to choose another “Bride.” And we circle the *Sefer Torah* to proclaim that we would like to be fulfilling all His mitzvot all year long as well.

## SUKKAH CONTRADICTION

Sukkot has some sort of paradox in it. On the one hand, we are to go out to the hut and live a temporary lifestyle for a week, to internalize the lesson of temporariness in this world. On the other hand, there is a concept of *תשבו כעין תדורו* – the sukkah needs to be livable, as if one could live in it permanently. If the Sukkah is not livable, it is forbidden to make a Beracha on it. There is even a law that one is to bring all of his fancy household items into the Sukkah and make the Sukkah somewhat luxurious. So, what lesson are we to get out of this? Temporariness, or Lavishness?

I heard the answer to this question this morning at a Brit, by a student from Yeshivat Kol Torah. His

Our Rabbis also tell us that by putting all of the Four Species together, we show the underlying unity of the four different types of Jews. Those who study Torah, but do not have mitzvot, are similar to the lulav – which has taste (the dates), but no fragrance. Hadassim are fragrant, but lack taste – similar to those who do mitzvot, but do not study Torah. Aravot lack both fragrance and taste, like those who do not perform mitzvot nor study Torah. The etrog, which has both fragrance and taste, represents those who study Torah and fulfill the Commandments as well. If one has the most beautiful etrog lulav and hadassim, but has no lowly aravot, he cannot fulfill the mitzvah. All four types are necessary to fulfill the mitzvah. Similarly, the Jewish People is comprised of all four types of Jews, and we cannot do without anyone of them.

The happiness that the Torah specifically commands us to reach on the Sukkot Festival can only be achieved through Jewish unity. This is the happiness of the *Simchat Beit Hashoevah*. And this is why the Haftarah of Shabbat Chol HaMoed about the final Redemption is so appropriate. If we would only recognize how very much we all need one other, we would be able to bring the final Redemption within reach.

name is Avraham Aryeh. I did not want to forget it, for it has a powerful message. Yes, the point of the Sukkah is to teach us the concept of temporariness in the world. So why are we to bring our luxurious utensils out into the Sukkah? Because if your life accessories are too luxurious to bring out to the Sukkah, if you have so many worldly possessions that your Sukkah cannot contain them, your lifestyle may be more materialistic than spiritual. Your materialistic lifestyle might contradict the temporary approach to this World that Judaism holds by. So yes, you need to have a lifestyle of *תשבו כעין תדורו*, a lifestyle in which the physical conditions are livable. But you also need it to be distanced from all the material objects that

magnetize one towards fantasizing permanence in this World.

## THINGS vs. RELATIONSHIPS

There is a secret in happiness that is hidden in Sukkot. On Sukkot, we are commanded to be happy. But what if I am not? There is a mitzvah in Sukkot to make our families happy. There is a mitzvah on Sukkot to be happy with G-d. But what if I am just not happy? What am I supposed to do, force myself to have a smile?

Well, Sukkot is the lesson, that if you are dependent on a nice cozy house for happiness, then you have no idea what happiness is. Because happiness is not dependent on things, it is dependent on relationships, and whatever relationships entail. Sukkot is not only about being happy with the minute, the simple things in life. It is about being so happy with relationships, such as our relationship with G-d, relationships with our family, that all those things that people covet, are just small stuff. Take a branch and a hut, and be happy with it. *אז ירננו כל עצי יער* – *Then, all the trees of the forest will exalt*. The Meiri (Sukkah 37) states that the reason why we shake the Lulav like we do in the shul, during the time when we say the parts of Hallel that thank Hashem, and during the time that we ask for a salvation, is because we are shaking, and even dancing, out of happiness – with a branch.

What are we happy about? Shaking a branch? Sitting in some hut? Yes. We are happy that G-d accepted out Tefillot, that G-d forgave us on Yom Kippur. That G-d accepted us, and that we have Someone to pray to and to pour out our hearts. Acceptance is the key to love, and love = happiness. That even after a fight, even after the sin of the Calf, G-d accepts us and loves us so much that He forgives even the worst.

Rabbi Geisler taught this to me, the day after Yom Kippur. I was discussing with him the importance of relationships. He told me that he would ask his Talmidot, “What has more importance in your lives, Relationships or Things?” Every last student voted relationships.

“Okay,” said Rabbi Geisler, “What would happen, if your groom would tell you during your

engagement, that his parents can buy you the nice, fancy engagement rings. And then he expresses his feelings about buying your ring. ‘But I do not want my engagement ring to come from them. I want the ring that I am going to give you bought with my own, hard earned money. This ring means a lot to me. I want to take all the money I made in camp, all the money I made tutoring, all the money I saved from my allowance, and with that money I want to buy you your ring. Are you okay with that?’”

All of the Talmidot said, “Of course!”

Then Rabbi Geisler threw at them the curve ball. “Now, you’re sitting with all your friends, who are Kallahs, and everyone is showing off their ring. Each friend’s diamond is bigger than the next! And your diamond is so small! You need a magnifying glass to notice it on the ring. Would you stick out your ring finger to show off your diamond?”

The Talmidot said, “No way!”

“Why not? Aren’t relationships more important than things?”

It seems, that even though we value relationships more, but Things keep getting in the way of our happiness and contentment, they become bigger than life. So much bigger, that the value of relationships become forgotten.

The Lulav is not just a branch. It is our symbol that G-d allowed us to win; He tipped the Scale in our favor. It is our sword that we hold up, victorious, as we claim, *הודו לה' כי טוב*. It is what we fight the Satan with, as if we stick it in his eye. (Sukkah 37, see Sfat Emet) It is not just a Thing that we shake in shul; it is about our relationship with G-d, our trust in G-d, that He fights our battles for us and we can take on even the biggest enemies, with just a spiky Lulav branch/sword, and our faith that He accepted us.

Sukkah is not a hut. It is a hug. Two walls and a bit, as if an arm is hugging with a hand – the hug of G-d.(Arizal) If someone says to you, casually, “I

wish G-d would, I do not know, just hug me or something”, invite him to your Sukkah. That’s when and where G-d hugs. משכני אהריך נרוצה הביאני המלך חדריו (Shir Hashirim 1, 4) (see Gra)

This is the secret of happiness. It is not the things; it is what they represent. Most people believe, more things = more happiness. This is the biggest “con job” of marketing. If only you had “more”, you could be happier. But it is not having things that brings you your happiness; it is relationships. If we could learn to focus on the deeper meaning of things in life, then we would be able to find happiness. If we would recognize G-d’s love and care, then we could celebrate life, even if our living quarters were some hut, and even if we just danced around Shul with a branch, a few twigs, and a fruit.

And one more point. On Sukkot, it is not only a mitzvah to be happy. On Sukkot G-d *judges us* as to how much rain we are going to have on the basis

of how happy we are. Living in the Sukkah, shaking that branch and twigs, Simchat Beit Hashoevahs, making our wives and kids happy with whatever. What is the connection between rain and happiness? G-d waited to bring the first rain, until Adam was around, because G-d will not bring rain without appreciation. The more appreciation one has, the more happiness one has. Many shy away from giving recognition for something they should appreciate, for they do not want to feel that they owe anything to any source outside themselves; but still, appreciation equals happiness. Your relationships depend upon your appreciation. And we are judged on Sukkot as to how much rain we are going to get, by our expression of happiness over ‘some branch’. This happiness is the secret to being זוכה בדן, to passing Judgment, safely!

## I VERSES ME

The nature of people is that there are a couple of voices inside us, a few different emotions. When we decide the way we feel or how we would like to think, this means that we just chose one of the many things going on inside us that we prefer to support. Impulsivity is when there is no conscious decision of which emotion is the healthiest or most effective, or which thought is the truest. Instead, the most powerful emotion or most repetitious thought just takes over without the person being aware of what is going on inside. This also true when people talk about themselves. We may hear someone say, “I hate myself”, and the like. This just means that “I” is not “myself”. And that there is a voice, deeper inside than myself. Getting in touch with that deeper voice can help us to understand who we truly are and ultimately, what we truly want.

In our parasha we discover something amazing about the Evil Inclination, the inner voice, and we learn exactly how “inner” it is. The Talmud (Shabbat 146a) writes that the Nachash did not just push Chava. He had marital relations with her and put in Chava his זוהמה or foulness. R’ C. Volozhin explains this foulness to mean that the Nachash put the Evil Inclination in Chava and in all humanity.

Before the Nachash was together with Chava, the Evil Inclination was outside the person and tried to persuade him – from outside – to do evil. After the Sin, the Evil Inclination became a part of the inner person. In other words, when the Evil Inclination is talking inside the person, the person thinks that it is himself talking. When one feels that he wants to sin, to give in to lust, get angry and the like, it is the inner voice that says, “I want to sin, I want what I lust, I am angry. I am hungry. I am tired.” This is in stark contrast to the Good Inclination that says “You need to learn Torah”, “You must pray”, and not “I want to learn” or “I want to pray”. Being that the Evil Inclination became so integrated in the “me” after the Sin, it is so much harder to recognize it and fight it. The first thing that one must do is, of course, to recognize that the inner voice that is suggesting we sin is not the real “me”. (See נפש החיים א,ו הגהה”ה)

When listening to people, I follow them all the way through. And then I ask them, “So, what do you want to do about this?” And then they say that they do not know. This is amusing. Before they poured out their hearts, they approached me knowing what they wanted to do. After being listened to, the person listens to himself and realizes that what he

wanted to do at first is not at all what he *really* wants. This is probably what happens with the Evil Inclination inside people: that the person at first has this inner feeling saying this is what “I” want. And then he realizes that this is not at all what he really wants.

And this is the secret of the successful as well. They have only one inner voice going on. The know how to control all the other voices inside that

### LOVE AFTER HATE

In the Talmud (in Sotah 14a), R’ Simlai states that the Torah starts off with Gemilut Chassadim (kindness) and it ends with Gemilut Chassadim (kindness). It starts off with G-d’s kindness because it says “And Hashem made for Adam and for his wife Kotnot Or, and He dressed them”. And the Torah ends with G-d’s kindness, regarding Moshe’s burial. *And G-d buried Moshe in “Guy” in the land of Moab...* This Midrash seems to be telling us about the importance of doing Chessed, doing kindness, by stating that the Torah begins and ends with kindness, and that the Torah is full of kindness.

The question is obvious. Why does R’ Simlai bring out the point that the Torah starts with Hashem’s kindness of clothing Adam and Chava after the Sin? Why not mention that the Torah starts off with G-d’s ultimate kindness in creating this Universe with so much good in it to give to mankind?

The answer I saw for this is that the level of kindness after sin is on a completely different level from that before sin. G-d’s kindness to humans *after* the sin shows how kind He really is. This is somewhat similar to what happens with newlyweds. They are loving toward each other, excited to be together, until their first disagreement. Then, after their first dispute, they have the real test to see if they love each other or not. Can they get back together again, or not? A loving couple is not one that does not disagree. It is one who knows how to deal with the differences and look past shortcomings.

Sukkot is a beautiful holiday, and it is hard for all of us that is over. The holiday of Sukkot is one of

lead them away from what they really want to do. They have only one ambition inside, one goal. This is what is meant in the recital of the daily Shema, to love our G-d with all our hearts, all our soul and all our being, even with our evil inclination. The only way one can succeed is by realizing that all the inner voices say that the “I” wants to love G-d, to serve Him and be dedicated to Him.

love and happiness. So, I thought it would be nice to connect the aforementioned idea, explaining exactly why the holiday of Sukkot is one of love and of happiness. Sukkot is, in some ways, a celebration of our ability and desire to live with G-d and His commandments. It is for a purpose that Sukkot is immediately after Yom Kippur. We are happy to live in His Presence, knowing that He can still find place to accept and atone our sins. This was the love of G-d that we felt when He gave us the Second Tablets and gave us the Mishkan. He wanted to live in our midst, despite the Sin of the Calf. And this is why we make a Simchat Torah after Sukkot, and not on Shavuot. There is no dancing on Shavuot. On Shavuot we accepted the Torah through G-d’s command, not knowing what was in it. We were afraid that we might not be able to live by the Torah. After we receive the Torah and know what it says, when we know that it has a Yom Kippur in it, and that G-d is forgiving, we know that G-d in His Mercy will have patience with us, although we are humans and have human flaws. We now know that He is willing to accept that and forgive us after true repentance. This is a new happiness, a new love. So we dance with the Torah, circling the Bimah seven times, as a remembrance of the seven times we circled the walls of Yericho with Yehoshua, bringing down the walls. On Simchat Torah we bring down the walls that stand between G-d and His People. The day of Simchat Torah is over, but the relationship is not. The relationship has just begun, and it just went up to a new level.

### SIBLING – FRIEND OR FOE

Siblings are either friends or rivals. There is no *pareve*. There is no position where one says I do not love my brother but I do not hate him. This is because the natural state of brothers is to love each other. If they do not love each other, then they have to give a reason why they do not love each other. This reason, whatever it is, is an excuse to hate. Sometimes, it is not felt as hate. But that is just a misinterpretation.

When brothers have something like a block between them, such as the thoughts, “Why does he not care for me?”, or “How come he always outsmarts me and gets more out of my parents, more out of our relationship than I do,”- there is not usually something rational that can help such a person get over things and get on with his or her sibling relationship. The reason is because such issues have been hashed and rehashed in the mind, with all types of negative beliefs and thoughts of how things should go, the way “I” perceive them. By adding to the hurt sibling a piece of information, or helping to change perspective, this does not have a long lasting effect in him getting along with the situation at hand. The reason for this is because it is not a matter of having knowledge or perception. It is a matter of applying it.

We find this in the last conversation Kayin had with his brother, mentioned in the Midrash (Breishit Rabba 22). *And who was stronger of the two? R' Yochanan says that Hebel was stronger than Kayin. We see this from the words that Kayin “got up” to Hebel, and he killed him. The word that Kayin got up intimates that Kayin was on the floor, pinned down by Hebel. Hebel was about to kill Kayin to defend himself. But then, right before his defeat, Kayin pleaded with Hebel, saying, “We are the only two people in this world, and our father Adam will know that it was you who killed me. How are you going to explain this to Dad? Hebel was immediately filled with mercy on his father and brother, and he let Kayin go. Then, Kayin “got up” and killed his own brother..*

R' C. Chechik points out that Kayin should have asked himself the same question he asked his own brother:, “What are you going to answer your father?” But this did not cross his mind when he was overcome with jealousy. When he was

incensed about his brother, he had something – compelling emotion – that he just could not rein in. *It was not the lack of knowledge. It was a matter of applying it.*

Another thing we notice about sibling rivalry. The answer given by Kayin to G-d, when G-d asked Kayin where his brother is, “Am I to be the one to watch my brother?” The Midrash explains that Kayin was actually saying, “Excuse me G-d, but it is your fault; You did not save my brother – it is not *my* job to watch him, it is Your job! You gave me an Evil Inclination, but how did you let me kill him?” The brother who hates has, and will find, any justification he can in order to back up his side of the argument, and there is just no way to help the angry brother by explaining to him that he is wrong.

As a matter of fact, the fights between siblings are always deeper than it appears on the surface. According to P' dR' Eliezer (21), Kayin was so jealous because Hebel's first-quality sacrifice was accepted and his low-quality sacrifice was not. Even deeper than that, Hebel's twin sister (who Hebel took as a wife) was the prettiest of all women, prettier than Kayin's twin sister. Kayin awaited the time that he could get rid of Hebel and then marry his wife. The Breishit Rabba adds another opinion. Hebel was a triplet with another two sisters, while Kayin was born with only one twin sister. Kayin claimed that he had rights, for he was the oldest and deserved double portion, while Hebel claimed that he had the rights to her for she was born together with him. And to top all this off there is something else underlying Kayin's animosity. Kayin did not believe that the curse of the land that Adam received after the sin of the Tree of Knowledge was applicable to him. He split the whole world with his brother Hebel: Kayin got all the land, and Hebel got all the livestock. Kayin said that the decree was only given to my father, for only he sinned, not his offspring. (Midrash Aggada) Kayin believed in every way that his brother was to be killed for stealing; Hebel's livestock were eating from *his* grass, without permission. The law of Noachites states that one who steals is to be punished by death. So, Kayin believed that he was doing the right thing by killing

his brother. And this is what G-d told him, **הלא אם תיטיב שאת ואם לא תיטיב לפתח השאת רובץ** If you will become better, you will be forgiven, and if not, the sin will haunt you... This is the simple explanation. But this can be understood in another way: if you, Kayin, would be able to better yourself, and get over your jealousy towards your brother and forgive him for allowing his livestock to eat your grass, he would not be considered as having stolen, and he would not be liable for death.( Alter of Novordohk, Madreigat Ha'adam)

The Zohar says that this is why the Torah forbids wearing wool and linen together in the same cloth. Wool is from livestock, and linen is fruit of the land. They must always be separated, for they caused the first fight. Only in the Holy Temple, the place of real peace and harmony in the total absence of jealousy, was *shaatnez*, a mixture of wool and linen, allowed on the garments of the Kohen. But in essence, wool and linen, Kayin and Hebel, are to be separated.

## WHAT MAKES YOU THINK THAT YOUR PARENTS LOVE YOU?

Have you ever noticed how many people today just do not “feel loved”? I always wondered as to exactly why humanity feels this way. A feeling that was never felt before to this degree. The Chida in Rosh David writes a beautiful explanation on the Sukkot Holiday that may just help us understand the unloved homo sapiens of today.

The Sukka that we eat and sleep in for a week's time each year is a remembrance of the Clouds of Glory, or Sukkot, that G-d made for us in the desert. The Chida asks: if we are meant to remember G-d's concern over us in the desert, why do we not make a remembrance of the Manna or the Well of Miriam? Isn't G-d's concern for our food and drink in the desert worthy of mentioning once a year as well? Why do we commemorate only the shade and make a whole holiday of it, whereas we make no such commemoration for the other two expressions of G-d's love for us?

There are a number of answers to this question. However, the Chida gives us an answer that is pertinent to our everyday living, and answered what I always wanted to know. The food and water in the desert were not luxury; rather, these are basic

“Separated”, here, does not mean that they should go each his own way. Not at all. It means that if Kayin, as is true for most of us, was living with a competitive mindset, one in which he looked at what his brother had, he could have done much more had he been busy doing the best he could do within the framework of his own given circumstances. He could have brought another sacrifice, one with a higher standard. For some reason, he did not think of that. Why? Because he was busy looking at his brother and what his brother had.

The way that a sibling can get over something is by asking himself , or having others ask him, ” So, what can you do about this? Sometimes, something. Sometimes, nothing. But this is a better way of dealing with jealousy than by comparing one person to the other and “seeing” who was right.

necessities without which one cannot get along. Portable shade, on the other hand , is a luxury for a traveler in the desert. This is something that G-d gave us, showing us that he is concerned not only with our survival, but also with our comfort. This shows, expresses and almost even shouts that He loves us. This is love that we *felt*. Of course, giving us food and water also shows us that he loves us. But the recipient of love does not feel loved when the one who is “responsible” for him takes care of *needs*. Only when they take care of the “wants” is the love felt. Sometimes , through this feeling of love, when the recipient gets his “wants”, it opens his eyes to the “needs” that he has received, and feelings of appreciation for them begin to surface, as well.

Another answer brought by the Chida is that we received the other two, the manna and the Well of Miriam, only after testing G-d. We received the shade, however, without asking, and when someone is thought about without having to ask or demand, he will often feel even more loved.

When talking to children ranging between the ages of 2 – 99, I have discovered that when I ask them if

and when they felt their parents' love, the answer would always relate to getting their "wants". Whether the child says that he feels his parent loves him because he got a candy, or because the parent agreed to paying for his cigarettes as part of his allowance, or that the parent watched over his children – the answer always reflects being given something "extra." For some reason, the answer is rarely, "I feel that my parents love me because they gave me food, clothes or shelter." Love is felt in wants, and being that our generation has become a society in which so many wants have become needs, and the wants have reached such a high level on the expectation scale, people are not happy. They do not feel loved. Even if they are. So, we move into a Sukka, a temporary dwelling, to recognize how many things which we have in our possession that are really just bonuses for survival. Then, we can truly feel happy with what we have. And then, hopefully, we will appreciate G-d's love to us in all that he has showered upon us.

This may be the difference in our prayers, morning and night, between the two blessings we bless before the Recital of Shma, the first for the sun, moon and Creation, the other we make a blessing

### THE ART OF ASSERTIVENESS

After Adam ate from the Forbidden Fruit and transgressed G-d's only command, G-d approached him in the most unusual way. Adam, ashamed of not heeding G-d's command, embarrassed now that he realized that he was in the undress, was hiding. G-d asks Adam, with the first word He spoke to Man. הַיְנִיחַ "Where are you?" Adam answered, "I heard You coming through Gan Eden, and I was afraid, for I am naked, so I went into hiding."

Why did G-d ask a question that He knew the answer to? Surely G-d knows where Adam is?!? Rashi explains that G-d wanted to open up a conversation so that Adam won't be shocked to answer, suddenly, if he would be punished. This is how G-d approaches people and communicates with them when He has a message to relay. When approaching Kayin after Kayin killed his brother Hebel, G-d asked, Where is Hebel, your brother? When G-d approached Bilaam, He asked, Who are these people who came to visit you?

for receiving the Torah. When we bless for the Torah, we mention and stress G-d's love for us. In the blessing for the sun, stars and Creation, we do not make such mention about G-d's love for us. The reason is the same: In regard to Creation, we need the Sun, Moon etc. for our survival, and it is almost understood that G-d "has" to provide us these things in order for humanity to exist. But in regard to the Torah, which is not needed for basic survival, we feel more love by receiving it from G-d. Being that we need the Creation for our existence, we do not feel the love of G-d through it, despite the fact that we received our existence only through G-d's Will.

We would, of course, be much happier people if we were to realize that we are loved through being provided with our "needs", as well.

(This article was inspired by the Parasha sheet on Sukkot this year of R' Chrysler, former Rav of Johannesburg)

This is a fantastic lesson in people skills, of knowing how to communicate when you were mistreated, abused, or wronged—conversation instead of criticism, understanding instead of accusation, assertive instead of aggressive or passive. Allow me to explain.

R' Shimshon Pincus asks, what was Adam supposed to answer when G-d asked him where are you? The answer is, Adam had a golden opportunity, but he blew it. Adam could have said, "I was wrong! I sinned! I was irresponsible!" If Adam had only said that he made a mistake immediately, G-d would not have put him under trial, He would not have brought death to the world, and G-d would not have him thrown out of Gan Eden's gates. Bilaam knew this "technique" of immediate confession, and when he was faced by the angel who had come to punish him for planning to curse the Jews, he confessed, and the angel could not punish him! The immediate confession was the difference between King David's response

to the prophet after being informed about his sin with Bat Sheva and King Saul's response to the prophet after being told of his mistake in not killing out Amalek. This answers why even though Adam lived a life of self-infliction, of repentance, Adam could not go back to his original status, because there is nothing like repenting at the first message. G-d opens conversation first to give you a chance for confession and resolution. He sends you hints and gives you space before He acts. If only Adam would have run into G-d's hands with tears and regret, when G-d asked, "Where are you" the story would have had an entirely different ending.

G-d is teaching us the most crucial lesson in people skills and how to confront people. There is a spectrum of how people react to conflict, crisis, insult, unfairness, disrespect, or awkwardness. On one extreme, you have a passive approach. Better not to say anything. After all, maybe I do not have the right to be first, even when I was. Perhaps I do not have the right to say I don't have the time, money, energy, head-space for something when I don't. Maybe I don't have the right to ask for a raise, although I deserve one. Perhaps the awkward relationship can never be fixed because making mistakes is not acceptable, even though I intend to learn from them. Maybe I don't have the right to confront the person who abused me verbally, physically, emotionally, or other sorts of abuse because, for whatever reason, the abuser has some kind of privileged position in the relationship dynamic. The passive mindset is the lose/ win type, never stand up for rights, only listen, accept, surrender, never confront. Always be the doormat to the insensitive.

On the other side of the spectrum is the aggressive approach. The aggressive type is the one who has a win/lose mindset and brings about a competitive atmosphere, with an I'm right/your wrong attitude. The aggressive does not listen to others' ideas, "It's my way or the highway." This, of course, alienates family and friends when one has a "me-first" mindset: recognition first, served first, and go through the door first. Even the nicest, well-meaning people can be aggressive and not take "no" for an answer. It is not that the aggressive

type is in the wrong of how he thinks or feels. It is his approach that is overwhelming.

The middle of the spectrum, the healthy balance, is the assertive approach. The one who knows how to stand up for his/her rights without stepping on the feet of others and can express negative emotions without personalizing the problem. The assertive one makes reasonable requests, knows how to give feedback, and recognizes that he is relaying a message to another person. The assertive always look for a win/win. Not pushy or intimidating, not causing resistance, but inspiring confidence, honesty and openness in others. The assertive one never makes another person feel victimized or put upon, and when the assertive criticize, it is always well justified and allows the other person an honorable retreat. Somehow, the assertive one knows how to make the conversation a positive experience for everyone. By opening conversation, by giving room for win/win, by giving Adam a chance to confess, G-d teaches us how to deal with confrontation assertively and humbly.

And G-d wants His creatures to follow in His way. G-d punished Moon, to minimize itself because of its aggressive/competitive message. Moon wanted to have its light reflect G-d, not to reflect Sun. But that is not what it asked. Moon asked, Why does Sun have its own light? The way you request, whatever you ask, determines what response you will get. Moon! What is it your business what Sun has or what it does not have?!? If you want that your light should be a reflection of G-d and not of Sun, so ask for it, without putting Sun down! When G-d split the water, between the upper waters of Heaven and Earth's lower waters, the lower waters of Earth cried that they, too, want to be close to G-d. G-d granted them grace and accepted their wish. We need to sprinkle Sea salt on every sacrifice, and on Sukkot in Temple times, we rejoice when we pour water on the Alter. Why did G-d push Moon away, *לכי ומעטי את עצמך*, *Go, and make yourself small!*, while the waters of Earth are brought close to G-d, at the most precious moments of sacrifice? Because of the way of the ask. Are you aggressive, or are you assertive?

You were born knowing how to breathe, smell, eat, cry, fill a diaper, crawl, and crave candy. You were



not born knowing how to deal with people, give them space, or constructive criticism and feedback. Assertiveness is one of the most important interpersonal relationship skills to develop to succeed in life and a skill well worth learning.

Selfie steps to express yourself assertively.

1. The fine line between passive, aggressive, and assertive, can be pivotal in the type of life you live. Passive people let others decide. Aggressive people decide for others. Assertive people decide for themselves.
2. Pay attention to how you drive because it's a good indicator of what kind of character you have. Are you assertive, cautious, and confident when you need to be? Are you aggressive and reckless? Or are you the passive driver type, timid and overly paranoid?
3. Be respectful. Look confident, stand up straight, smile, or keep a neutral facial expression.
4. Don't interrupt when others are speaking, listen respectfully. Try to understand their point of view. Differences don't mean you are right, and the other person is wrong. Don't allow differences to annoy you, upset you or make you angry.
5. Be simple, direct, and concise. When asserting yourself, remember, less is more. Keep your requests free of long-winded explanations.
6. Be present. Stay calm when expressing yourself. Remaining calm will make you more confident and allow the other person to relax.

## A HUMBLE NATION

If you had one message to pass on to your children, one lesson, one virtue, what would it be? The Ramban, one of our people's greatest rabbis, left one message to his son, and to all of us, in his Iggeret. Humility. And he promises us that any day that we take humility to heart, G-d will give us our heart's desires! Why is humility such an important thing? I will explain, but first, allow me to relate a recent coaching experience.

A certain Rosh Yeshiva sent an 18 year-old boy to me to help him overcome his fears. When he phoned me, I went straight to the point, using some CBT tools from my toolbox. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy focuses on challenging and changing unhelpful thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes. "What are you afraid of?" "I am afraid that I have fears that others don't have." "Like what?" "Like that I might get old, and be alone, and then die."

I challenged his fears. I guided him. And then, at the height of my work, when he confronted the fear of death, and I helped him not to be afraid ... the battery on his phone died. He did not call me back,

so a day later, I called him. He said he did not call me back, because I made his fears worse. I said that we had only just begun, and we should continue. I think we should meet in person. (Something I regret not having done at the outset.) He said that he would call me back, if he was interested.

Since the Rosh Yeshiva was already involved with and responsible for the boy, I felt the responsibility to tell him how our conversation went, and that the boy is no longer in touch with me. Hearing how I worked with the boy, the Rosh Yeshiva smiled, and said, R' Yosef, you were *too* good. You conquered his fear; but now, he is afraid of *you*. He must be afraid that if you won over his fears so easily, while he could not do this easy thinking on his own, he must have a *real* anxiety problem!

How did I forget the first thing that R' Geizler taught us in coaching? The coach's job is not only to help make the client great, but to make him *feel* great as well! To put *him* in the spotlight. If I come out being Mr. Smarts, if I "won", and the

client comes out *feeling* inferior, that is not coaching. If the solution is too obvious, or if I feel I can solve a problem like fear of death in one session, I am not doing my job. Because the job of the coach is to make himself small, so that the client can make himself big.

After giving what the Rosh Yeshiva told me some thought, I realized the following lesson. Humility is a much better self-help tool than CBT, challenging the negative thoughts and beliefs, or any other gentile method. G-d made life in a way that life itself makes us humble. We have no power over death; we can just do our best to live a healthy lifestyle. We have no power over aging. No matter what we do, age somehow creeps up on us. And the best chance we have over not being alone in life is if we learn how to get along with people better, something that requires humility.

*Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi questioned the contradiction: one passuk says that Hashem made two luminaries, while the other passuk says, "the big luminary and the small luminary". The moon said before G-d, Master of the Universe, can it be that there are two kings ruling under the same crown? (How can both the sun and the moon rule the world equally?) G-d told her, Decrease yourself. "Master of the world! Because I expressed before You a good point, I need to make myself small?" G-d appeased the moon: Go and become what the Jewish Nation will use to count days and years... And the tzaddikim will be called "small", in your name. G-d saw that Moon was still not appeased, so He said to His People, Bring an atonement for Me, for I have made the moon small. Resh Lakish says, that is why on Rosh Hodesh, the Torah says to bring a goat of atonement "for G-d". This goat is an atonement for G-d making the moon small (Chullin 60b).*

If G-d needs atonement in any way, why do the Jews need to bring it? And what type of consolation is it that the Jews would use the moon for their calendar, or that the great men are called small?

It is obvious in the words of the Blessing on the New Moon, that there is a parallel between the moon and the Jewish Nation. The moon reflects the

sun. The Jews reflect G-d. Gentiles' calendars are solar, while Jewish calendars are lunar. Similar to the dynamic factor of the moon, the Jewish People go from small to becoming great, for our Nation has its times of darkness and its times of glory. And similar to the moon, the Jews are to be a beacon of faith in a world lacking in G-dliness and morality. But the greatest similarity of all is the element of reflection. The belief of our religion is that we are only a reflection of G-d, and what G-d wants us to have is exactly what we will have. Therefore, one of the fundamental beliefs of our Nation, is that the greatest way to go through this world is with humility. This is the message we are meant to learn from the moon.

In Judaism, in the self-help of the Torah, Humility is first and foremost. But the gentiles and their philosophers are not too impressed with humility. Aristotle omits it from his catalogue of virtues; both David Hume and Friedrich Nietzsche are critical of the humility trait. "Humility is a trait that serves no manner of purpose; neither advance a man's fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoyment."

Advancing fortunes? Becoming qualified entertainment of company? Increasing power of self – enjoyment? Since when are these the purposes of life? How dumb! That's the American lie. So many people have learnt, after much frustration and failure, that this is not what life is about. The only purpose that has real value in Nietzsche's list, is becoming a more valuable member of society. And humility is probably the most fundamental trait you need in order to become valuable to others. The gentiles do not like humility, because humility is acceptance that G-d is in charge. In Judaism, life is about accepting that G-d runs your world, not you. And the greater your humility, the more successful you will be. If you don't have good relationships in your family, or with people you know, if you are not entertaining, or if you do not enjoy life, the problem is likely to be an inflated ego, something that can actually be remedied through humility. Humility is something that G-d wants from His people, and that is the

secret of success of all the Tzaddikim: they make themselves small.

The Midrash adds to the conversation between Moon and G-d. *G-d said, I really wanted to make you great, and the sun small. But, since you complained, make yourself small, a 60<sup>th</sup> of the sun. Moon asked, "Why, because I made a point, You make me small?" G-d answered, "That is why, in the future, when Mashiach comes, I will make you great"* וְהָיָה אֹרֶחַ הַלְבָנָה כְּאֹרֶחַ הַסּוּף וְאֹרֶחַ הַסּוּף יִהְיֶה עֲמוּ שְׁבַעֲתַיִם כְּאֹרֶחַ שְׁבַעַת הַיָּמִים בְּיוֹם חֲבַשׁ יִקְוֶה אֶת־שָׂכָר עִמּוֹ יִרְפָּא וְיִמְטֵן מִכְתּוֹ יִרְפָּא (Yeshayahu 30:26) (Midrash Konen).

G-d is waiting for us to be really humble, and in that merit, He will bring Mashiach. In most Siddurim, after the three Amidahs, there is a humility prayer. *May it be the will in front of You G-d, that I not become jealous, nor that others become jealous of me. That I not become angry, and not make You angry. And save me from my Evil Inclination. And put in my heart, humility and*

*modesty, and fear of G-d. Our King, Our G-d. Make Your Name one in Your world, and build Your Home. Fix Your Sanctuary and gather our exiles. Free Your flock, and make Your congregation rejoice hurriedly in our days. And place our portion in Your Torah. Amen.* Look at how great G-d will make us, if we would only work on our humility!

The moon is still small today, until Mashiach comes, because we have not learned this lesson of humility yet. And until we learn this lesson of humility, G-d wants us to bring the atonement sacrifice, every Rosh Hodesh. May we merit to be humble, speedily in our days.

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