

# מעני תורה

ראש השנה  
יום כיפור  
סוכות

**“But your repentance I will not accept?”**

Mrs. Ariella Rosenbaum  
Science Department

During *minchah* of *Yom Kippur* we read *Sefer Yonah*. Yonah, a prophet of *HaShem*, was commanded to warn the non-Jewish city of Nineveh of its sins, and cause them to repent and ultimately be saved. One of the reasons we read this story is to learn about the *teshuvah*, repentance, which *HaShem* accepted from Nineveh. In the *Peskita de-Rav Kahana* (160-161), there is a *midrash* in which the People of Israel discuss repentance with *HaShem*:

The People of Israel said before *HaShem*: Master of the Universe, if we repent, will you accept [our repentance]?

He said to them:

The repentance of Cain I have accepted, but your repentance I will not accept?

The repentance of Ahab I have accepted, but your repentance I will not accept?

The repentance of the people of Anatot I have accepted, but your repentance I will not accept?

The repentance of the people of Nineveh I have accepted, but your repentance I will not accept?

The repentance of the Menashe I have accepted, but your repentance I will not accept?

The repentance of the Yechoniah I have accepted, but your repentance I will not accept?

*HaShem's* rhetorical responses give us examples of people who sinned and whose *teshuvah*, though flawed in some way, was nevertheless accepted by *HaShem*. By looking at the sins and repentance of each of these people, we can learn about how to do *teshuvah* ourselves and gain

hope that at the end of *Yom Kippur*, our *teshuvah* will be accepted.

According to the Rambam (*Hilchot Teshuvah*) there are several

aspects of *teshuvah* that have to be fulfilled in order to achieve a complete *teshuvah*. These include *charatah* (regretting the sin), *azivat ha-chet* (leaving the sin), *viduy* (verbal confession of the sin to God) and *kabbalah al ha-atid* (promising to not commit the sin again). Using this model, we will look at each of the aforementioned characters to see what was missing in his *teshuvah*.

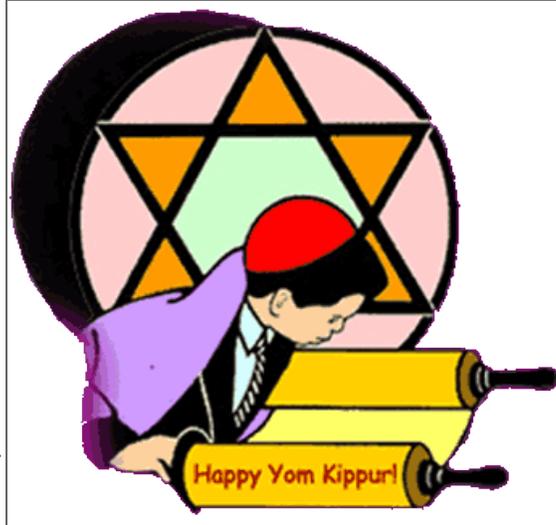
Cain killed his brother in an act of rage, and when confronted by *HaShem*, he initially denied his sin, saying “Am I my brother’s keeper?” When *HaShem* accused him of murder and punished him with a life of wandering, Cain said that he was afraid that he will be killed while wandering. This selfish response was enough for *HaShem* to revise the punishment by giving Cain protection: a mark on his forehead (*Bereshit* 4). Cain’s repentance was a low form. Cain regretted his sin, but purely for selfish reasons, mainly his own personal safety. This was enough, however, for *HaShem* to give him some reprieve.

Ahab’s wife Izevel set up Navot to be killed so that Ahab could take possession of Navot’s vineyard. Eliyahu *ha-navi* told Ahab that as punishment, *HaShem* will annihilate Ahab’s family line. When Ahab hears Eliyahu’s curse, he ripped his clothing, fasted and mourned. Due to his repentance, *HaShem*



postponed a portion of the curse to occur not in Ahab's time, but in the future (*Melachim I* 21). Malbim (21:29) explains that Ahab repented due to his fear of the punishment, not from regret of his sin. Although Ahab accomplished *viduy*, he did not have the prerequisite of regretting his sin.

The people of Anatot were the family of Yirmiyahu *hanavi*, but they shunned him and his prophesies even though he was their flesh and blood. *HaShem* cursed them to have no remnant after the Babylonian exile (*Yirmiyahu* 11:23). However, when the returnees from exile are recorded, there are 128 people of Anatot who returned to Jerusalem from Bavel (*Ezra* 2:23). Radak (*Yirmiyahu* 11:23) says that only at the time of punishment, when Nevuchadnezar was conquering the land, did the people of Anatot repent. Like Ahab, this was not a complete repentance because their repentance came from fear of the punishment, not regret of the sin.



The people of Nineveh, in the story of Yonah, were told that in 40 days they will be destroyed due to their sins, which included thievery. Their repentance seemingly included all of the necessary components to be considered a complete *teshuvah*. The *sefer* records that even the animals did acts of repentance (*Yonah* 4). A possible reason for why the people of Nineveh are included in this rhetorical list is because they are not Jewish, yet *HaShem* accepted their repentance anyway. Therefore, if a Jew were to do *teshuvah* like this, even more so will it be accepted by *HaShem*.

Menashe is often considered the most evil of all the kings of Judah. His sins included idolatry and desecration of the *Beit HaMikdash*. When the King of Assyria took Menashe into exile and tortured him, Menashe repented and was returned to his throne. It may seem that Menashe's repentance was similar to Ahab's repentance due to a fear of punishment, but there is another flaw in the *teshuvah* of Menashe as well. The *navi* records all of Menashe's efforts to rectify his errors, including getting rid of idols in Jerusalem. However, there were many in the general populace who followed in Menashe's original evil ways, despite his efforts (*Divrei HaYamim* 2:33). Although Menashe himself repented, he was unsuccessful in changing

the ways of the people he had influenced to do evil. *HaShem* accepted Menashe's *teshuvah*, despite the damage that he caused to the people of Israel.

Yechoniah, the second to last king of Judah, was cursed because of his sins to be childless and not continue the throne of Judah. No *teshuvah* is recorded in *Tanach*. However, Yechoniah did have children, despite the curse, and his descendant Zerubavel ascended to the leadership of the returning Babylonian exiles. *Vayikra Rabbah* (19) explains that Yechoniah was allowed to be with his wife in prison, and during that time he kept the family purity laws. Apparently, even this proper behavior of Yechoniah was enough for *HaShem* to reconsider his curse, even though Yechoniah did not seem to do any of the steps of *teshuvah* for his previously committed sins. Following the *mitzvot*, unrelated to one's sin, can help reduce or remove one's punishment.

When *Yom Kippur* comes to a close and we read of Nineveh, and *HaShem*'s acceptance of their repentance, we should be encouraged to continue on our path of *teshuvah*.

*HaShem* is willing to accept our *teshuvah*, as He did even with those sinners whose *teshuvah* was not sincere or complete. May our *teshuvah* be complete and completely accepted by *HaShem*.

### Wake Up to the Sound of the *Shofar*

Julie Schwartz (13)

What is the real purpose or symbolism of blowing the *shofar*? The most common explanation is that the *shofar* a tool to "wake us up" and remind us to do *teshuvah* during the days leading up to *Rosh HaShanah*. The *shofar* is in fact an extremely symbolic instrument in the Torah, and is frequently seen as a bond between man and his Creator.

Rav Sa'adyah Gaon, quoted by Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov in *The Book of Our Heritage*, offers many symbolisms for the *shofar*. At *Akeidat Yitzchak*, when Avraham was going to sacrifice his son Yitzchak, a ram, the animal from which the *shofar* comes, appeared and was sacrificed instead. Therefore, we are reminded that we too should be like Avraham, ready to give up everything for *HaShem*.

The second symbolism of the *shofar* is of *Matan Torah*,

where the *shofar* was also blown. The reminder of *Matan Torah* signifies that we, as G-d's people, are recommitting and reaccepting His Torah as ours. Another idea is that thousands of years ago during the time of the *Beit HaMikdash*, when enemies would come, trumpets would sound which alerted everyone of the imminent danger. The sound of the *shofar* reminds us of the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* and therefore gives us a inducement to pray so it will once again be built. Thus, it is clear that the *shofar* is always an instrument that leads us on the right path back to *HaShem*.

Rabbi Shraga Simmons offers the following to explain why we have the *shofar* to “wake us up.” He quotes the *Talmud*, which says, “When there is judgment from below, there is no need for judgment from above.” It is our job to try to recognize the mistakes that we have made as well as the changes we may want to make in the future. Every one of us needs to look within ourselves and understand where we are and where we want to be. If we do this, then there is no need for *HaShem*, up above, to “wake us up” because we constructively examine ourselves.

Blowing the *shofar* on *Rosh HaShanah* is a true testament of our continued commitment to *HaShem* and to the Torah, and of our desire to change ourselves for the better. With the *asret yimei teshuvah*, every person is given the opportunity to do true *teshuvah* and be closer to *HaShem*. On *Rosh HaShanah* when the *shofar* blasts, we should all recognize that is it more than merely “waking us up”;



the symbol of a pledge to always be *HaShem*'s people and to lead a *Torah* life. But we are not supposed to change ourselves drastically in the week and a half between *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*. We begin sounding the *shofar* on *Rosh Chodesh Elul*, a month before *Rosh HaShanah*, to give us ample time to atone for our sins. Waking up is a process that we struggle with daily, and we continually need to push ourselves to be better people. The way we act starting the month of *Elul* is a preview of how we will perform during the coming year.



### ***Rosh HaShanah: Joy or Fear?***

Elana Blanchard ('12)

Unlike some of the other holidays during this time of year, *Rosh HaShanah* has both the aspect of celebration as well as the elements of *teshuvah* and judgement. *Rosh HaShanah* is right after the month of *Elul*, which makes the holiday related to *teshuvah*—a serious and frightening holiday. At the same time, *Rosh HaShanah* is joyous and lighthearted. These two very different aspects of *Rosh HaShanah* make it the complex holiday that we find ourselves celebrating every September.

When thinking about *Rosh HaShanah*, many positive memories come to mind; the singing, the food, and celebrating with family. Rav Yehuda Green speaks a lot about the upbeat and celebratory factors. He says that since *Rosh HaShanah* is the anniversary of the establishment of G-d's kingdom, it is a time to celebrate the relationship between G-d and us and to feel the divine connection. Every year brings the Creation closer to realizing the purpose for which G-d created it. He explains that within the *davening* of *Rosh HaShanah*, there is an ongoing theme of G-d as the Creator of mankind.

These jubilant proclamations, however, go hand in hand with the judgment component of this high holiday. When thinking about G-d's power, we are left in awe, and at the same time we are humbled, realizing our position in the broader world. Rav Shlomo Carlebach taught that in a certain way, we are coming to G-d and saying, “*Ribbono Shel Olam*, give me a good year.’ G-d says to me, ‘Let’s see how much [merit] you have.’ I say to G-d, ‘The truth is, I have nothing. I’m not coming to buy. I’m coming to beg.’” (Reb Shlomo.org). When recognizing that G-d is the Creator of the world, we become humbled and realize that we are simply pawns in the large world that *HaShem* created.

Thus, the time surrounding *Rosh HaShanah* is a season of introspection. We must consider whether or not we have

worked to contribute to the creation and mission G-d set out for us in the large scheme of things. Rav Shlomo Carlebach also explains this very idea in relation to the month leading up to *Rosh HaShanah*. Rav Shlomo understood that in Aramaic the word “*Elul*” means “search.” We must all search within ourselves in order to fully do *teshuvah*. *Elul* is seen as a time to search one’s heart and draw close to G-d in preparation for the coming *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*. The Talmud writes that “*Elul*” in Hebrew can be expanded as an acronym for “*Ani Le-Dodi ye-Dodi li*.” This is translated as “I am to my Beloved and my Beloved is to me.”

With the combination of awe and introspection, we are able to experience the intense month of *Elul* and prepare ourselves for the intense days to follow. On *Rosh HaShanah* my “fixing” is not that I am telling G-d my own mistakes; repentance is saved for *Yom Kippur*. Rather, on *Rosh HaShanah*, we must remember that G-d created the whole world and created us. This is our anniversary. We now have a mission, and we must fulfill it; and we pray that we have fulfilled it in the past year.

### What’s In a Name?

#### The Various Aspects of *Rosh HaShanah*

Michal Cohen (’12)

The exact nature of *Rosh HaShanah* is somewhat unclear. Is the day somber because we are begging G-d for forgiveness and to judge us favorably, or is it happy because it is the commemoration of the creation of the world? This ambiguity is seen in the fact that *Rosh Hashanah* has four different names: *Yom HaDin*, *Yom HaZikaron*, *Yom Teru’ah*, and *Zichron Teru’ah*. Through a closer evaluation of these four names, we can try to find the true essence of *Rosh HaShanah* and what attitude we should have on this very important holiday in our calendar.

The aspect of the holiday expressed in the name of *Yom HaDin* is that it is a day connected to *Yom Kippur* – *HaShem* judges our deeds from the previous year and we beg for His forgiveness. This connection can be seen in the *tefillot* of both holidays as well as the fact that they are literally connected by the period of time in the middle of them, called the *aseret yemei teshuvah*. We learn this characteristic of the holiday from the first *mishnah* in *Massechet Rosh HaShanah*, which states, “On *Rosh HaShanah*, man is judged by *HaShem*.” This *mishnah* makes *Rosh HaShanah* seem like a serious and formidable day, designated for *teshuvah* and judgment.

*Yom HaZikaron* and *Zichron Teru’ah* suggest that the essence of *Rosh HaShanah* is more historical, because the idea of “*zikaron*” is that we must remember our past and the history of our people and the world at large. Indeed, there is a tradition that *Rosh HaShanah* marks the day of the beginning of the creation of the world. This seems to be an occasion for celebration. We not only celebrate the general creation of the world, we also exult and take pride that *HaShem* created us and that He continues to have faith in us. Accordingly, some people have a custom to dress in white to show confidence that *HaShem* will grant us a good new year, that He loves us and that He will judge us favorably. The historical side of *Rosh HaShanah* allows us to reflect on our past, remember how we got here, and rejoice in the fact that *HaShem* created the world and still allows us to exist within it.



The name *Yom Teru’ah* suggests a more biblical context through which we should experience the day, as it is the first name that is used to refer to the holiday in the Torah (*Vayikra* 23:24). “*Teru’ah*” is the sound that comes from the *shofar*, which shows that the *shofar* is central to the significance of *Rosh HaShanah*. In fact, there is an entire section of the *musaf* prayers that we say on *Rosh HaShanah* that is completely dedicated to *shofarot*. The *shofar* is much more than just a horn, but rather a conduit through which we are called upon to do *teshuvah* and introspect. While the other names of the holiday imply a grander vision of *Rosh HaShanah*, *Yom Teru’ah* shows a more personal side to the holiday.

These four appellations for *Rosh HaShanah* can shed light on the nature of the holiday itself. Although the holiday has certain holy and solemn aspects to it, it is also a day of rejoicing. Rav Tzadok HaCohen explains that this is seen in the structure of how we blow the *shofar*: the *shevarim* and *teru’ah* blasts, representing a broken spirit crying out to *HaShem*, are always sandwiched in between *teki’ot*, which represent joy and happiness by way of their fullness and completeness. This, he imparts, shows the way that we must act and feel on *Rosh HaShanah*. While on the outside we should celebrate, because it is a *Yom Tov*, internally we must understand that we are being

judged by *HaShem* and internalize the fear that anything can happen to us, and we must put that fear into practice by doing *teshuvah* during the *tefillot* of *Rosh HaShanah* and the ensuing *aseret yemei teshuvah*. May we all be able to internalize the names of *Rosh HaShanah* and, through them, have a truly meaningful *Rosh HaShanah* and new year.

### Open the Doors of *Teshuvah* on *Rosh HaShanah*

Chana Miller (׳12) and Emily Blumenfeld (׳12)

The time between *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur* is a special time for everyone's prayers to be heard by *HaShem*. *Tefillah* is a means to *teshuvah*, because connecting with *HaShem* allows us to connect with ourselves. The meaning of the word *teshuvah* is "returning." When we do *teshuvah*, we are returning ourselves to our true nature and freeing ourselves from any bad within. *Teshuvah* is a way to relieve oneself of temptations and desires and become free of sins. The point of *teshuvah* is not to make anything new; rather, it is to find the excellence that has always been within. We should never forget that we have the potential to become better people. *HaShem's* doors are always open and he is constantly waiting for us to return to Him, and to our true selves.

*Rosh HaShanah* is a time when one has the power to do *teshuvah* and be written in *HaShem's* Book of Life. This is the time when each person reevaluates himself to become a better person. In this way, *Rosh HaShanah* is similar to the American way of celebrating the new year in January. The American New Year's Day is a time when people make resolutions to become better. Resolutions show that we have faith in ourselves to actually push and become the good people we want to be. Similarly on *Rosh HaShanah*, our *tefillah* and *teshuvah* express our confidence that we are able to become better people, and enable us to focus on improving ourselves. Prayer has always been the key to salvation when the Jewish people have faced troubles. *Rosh HaShanah* is a time when every Jew in the world is praying to *HaShem* for forgiveness. The Jewish people are united through prayer and therefore can strongly influence the coming of the *ge'ulah*. Every prayer going up to *HaShem* hastens



the final redemption. The primary way to ultimately bring about the *Mashiach* is by praying and pouring out one's soul to *HaShem*. Every *tefillah* shows trust and complete faith in *HaShem*. The *ge'ulah* will only come when we show our full faith and reliance in *HaShem*. Our *tefillot* on *Rosh HaShanah* thus lead to both our personal return and our national, ultimate redemption.

### The Thematic Connectedness of the *Chagim*

Temima Kanarfogel (׳14)

The month of *Tishrei* in the Jewish calendar is practically inundated with holidays – first *Rosh HaShanah*, then *Yom Kippur*, and finally *Sukkot*. *Yom Kippur* seems to be the most significant of the three, since *HaShem* decides on that day what our future year will hold and whether or not He chooses to forgive us for our sins in the previous year.

It is important to explore how the other two holidays connect with *Yom Kippur*. Since *Yom Kippur* is such a prominent holiday in our nation's psyche, it is logical to assume that *Rosh HaShanah* and *Sukkot* each play some form of a supporting role based on proximity to *Yom Kippur*.

*Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur* are related in a fairly clear way. In both holidays, *teshuvah* and the blowing of the *shofar* feature prominently. Specifically, in the *tefillah* of "U-netaneh *Tokef*," recited during *chazarat ha-shatz* on *Rosh HaShanah*, the two holidays are explicitly linked: "Be-Rosh HaShanah *yikateivun u-be-Yom Tzom Kippur yechateimun* – on *Rosh HaShana* [our fates] will be written and on *Yom Kippur* they will be sealed." There are some components of the *davening* on *Rosh HaShanah* that do not relate to *teshuvah*, such as the section in *Avinu Malkeinu* in which we ask *HaShem* for sustenance and support; however, the Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that since these requests are made in the context of asking for forgiveness, it shows that we are asking for these things for the purpose of *teshuvah* – we need to satisfy certain material needs in order to be able to fully serve *HaShem*, which includes seeking repentance and avoiding future sins.

It is slightly harder to find a connection between *Yom Kippur* and *Sukkot*. Although it is necessary to commemorate the booths in which the Jews lived in the desert or the clouds which protected them, why should the holiday happen at this time of the year? The Jews were in the

desert for 40 years, so it's not as if we are commemorating a specific moment in time, as with *Pesach*. One approach is that while verbal repentance is emphasized during *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*, the physical demonstration of it takes place on *Sukkot*. We ask on *Rosh HaShanah* for material items in order to aid in our *avodat HaShem*, and on *Sukkot* we take material objects (the huts that we build) and dedicate them to *HaShem's* service. *Sukkot* is the holiday on which we turn our thoughts and words into actions.

The stories of *Cheit HaEgel* and the *anannei ha-kavod* also help relate *Yom Kippur* to *Sukkot*. The Vilna Gaon explains that after *Cheit HaEgel* (which occurred on 17 *Tammuz*), the clouds of glory that served as a guide and source of protection for *Bnei Yisrael* disappeared. The following *Yom Kippur*, Moshe brought down the second pair of *luchot*, and the *Mishkan's* construction commenced on the first day of *Sukkot*. When *Bnei Yisrael* started to build the *Mishkan*, the *anannei ka-kavod* reappeared. The physical action of building the *Mishkan* was powerful enough to reconnect *Bnei Yisrael* with *HaShem*, even after they had committed one of the worst sins portrayed in the Torah. This truly shows the relationship between *Yom Kippur* and *Sukkot* – on *Yom Kippur* we repented and were redeemed by getting the new *luchot*, and on *Sukkot* that repentance came to fruition by way of the *Mishkan* and the *anannei ha-kavod*, both of which are possible reasons for the commemorative huts that we build.

The holidays of *Rosh HaShanah*, *Yom Kippur*, and *Sukkot* are all part of a process to achieve full repentance. Not only is it important to verbally repent, but also we must remember to actively demonstrate our remorse and desire to change for the sake of serving *HaShem*. These three consecutive holidays provide us with the chance to be forgiven for a year's worth of transgressions and to demonstrate that we want to actively devote ourselves to *HaShem*. Hopefully, we will take advantage of these *chagim* to achieve a clean slate of forgiveness and a new year full of *mitzvot* and *simchah*.

### The Ushpizin in Our Sukkot

Shira Hanau (13)

On *Sukkot*, there is a *minhag* to recite a *tefillah* for the *ushpizin*, the seven spiritual guests who visit our *sukkot* on each of the seven nights of the holiday. This *minhag* was started by the Kabbalists in the 16th century and dates back to the *Zohar*. The seven guests are Avraham,

Yitzchak, Yaakov, Yosef, Moshe, Aharon, and David. On each of the seven nights, one of the seven guests is the "head guest," and the *tefillot* are centered on him.

The seven guests all share a commonality of having been shepherds. Many of the people in *Tanach* who were chosen by *HaShem* to lead the Jewish people have been shepherds. There seems to be significance about shepherding that appeals to *HaShem* unlike any other profession. Shepherds must be caring and compassionate to their flocks, and must tend to the individual needs of the sheep. They must be especially considerate when they carry injured sheep that are not well enough to move with the rest of the flock. The shepherd must also have the ability to gently guide wandering sheep back into the herd without scaring them away. These are important leadership qualities. Not only must a leader be compassionate to his people, he must also pay attention to the more individualized needs of those in the group and he must include everyone.

The *ushpizin* teach us a lesson in leadership on each night of *Sukkot*. The lesson is that we must focus on being compassionate and work on emulating the individual qualities that the *ushpizin* were known for. Avraham was known for his hospitality. In the *ushpizin tefillah* that we recite, we mention that the food which will be served to the *ushpizin* guests will be given to the poor. By doing this, we exemplify the quality of hospitality. Moshe was known to be exceptionally humble. When we sit in the *sukkah*, a significantly less comfortable and elegant dwelling than our homes, we are inspired with humility. Aharon was known to be a peacemaker between Jews, and the joyous time of *Yom Tov* is an opportune time to create peace. By following the qualities of the *ushpizin*, we become better people.

In the *U-Netaneh Tokef* prayer, recited on *musaf* of *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*, we are compared to sheep that are passing under the shepherd's staff, while the shepherd counts and decides which ones to kill and which ones to let live. This line of the *tefillah* is usually sung by the congregation in a humbling and sobering tune. The words evoke a feeling of desperation and fear that one's fate for the coming year is being decided at that very moment. These feelings are not easy ones to forget.

The idea of sheep in the *ushpizin* can evoke the *U-Netaneh Tokef*-inspired feelings of desperation from a slightly different perspective. On *Sukkot*, one is no longer "passing under the staff." The *Yamim Nora'im* are over and a sense of relief and joy has washed over us. But the *ushpizin* remind us what it felt like to be in the position under the staff and the feelings it brought us. We remem-

ber how anxious and desperate we were and hopefully learn to act with mercy and compassion. We learn to be compassionate towards those who pass under our staff, or interact with us. We must learn to act with compassion towards others, as a shepherd acts towards his flock.

### The Message of the *Sukkah*

Shira Sohn ('14)

The *Gemara* in *Sukkah* 2a provides us with a few rules about *Chag ha-Sukkot*. At first glance, these rules appear to simply be guidelines for the construction of our *sukkot*, but they can actually help us in our daily lives. One rule that the *tanna kamma* suggests is that our *sukkot* cannot be taller than 20 *amot*. The *Gemara* then proceeds to offer a few reasons for why our *sukkot* cannot exceed 20 *amot*. One answer that Rava suggests is that on *Sukkot*, one is supposed to go from a *dirat keva*, a permanent dwelling, i.e., one's house, to a *dirat ar'ai*, a temporary dwelling, i.e., one's *sukkah*. But, if the *sukkah* were to be taller than 20 *amot*, it would be considered a *dirat keva*.

Initially, this seems to be just a logical explanation of the *tanna kamma's* rule. However, upon further interpretation, Rava's answer can actually give us an insight into *sukkot* and our everyday lives. A main concept of *sukkah* is "*teshvu ke-ein taduru*" – you should sit in your *sukkah* like you sit in your home. This means that on *Sukkot*, your *sukkah* is your permanent dwelling and you must treat it as such, eating, hanging out, and sleeping there. The *Mei HaShiloach* says that a *dirat keva* is something like school or *shul* where we have a set schedule, and a *dirat ar'ai* is when we're on vacation or at home on the weekends. In school, it is not so hard to go to davening each morning, because it is integrated into our schedules; but at home it is a lot harder. Everyone studies *Gemara* or *Tanach* for an upcoming test, but learning *Torah lishma* proves to be much more difficult. This is essentially the message of *Sukkot* – we are leaving our *dirat keva* and our daily schedules and going to a *dirat ar'ai*,

where life is more difficult, yet we are still expected to make our *sukkah* a permanent dwelling for seven days.

It is important to remember that just because we

may be on vacation, it does not mean we should forget our responsibilities as Jews, or neglect the Torah and *mitzvot*. At the start of the school year, we find ourselves constantly out of school whether for *Rosh HaShanah*, *Yom Kippur* or *Sukkot*. During those times, even though it might be easier to slack off on our responsibilities, we must try to act in our *dirat ar'ai* just like we do in our *dirat keva*. Just because we are on vacation from school does not mean we are on vacation from *Torah*.



### Hope in Times of Destruction

Aviva Weiner ('14)

The practice of building huts and living in them for seven days during the holiday of *Sukkot* can look extremely odd to an outsider. For one, most people would not relish the idea of giving up all of their material amenities for a week. Furthermore, it seems almost reckless to put ourselves out into the elements with relatively little protection. How can we understand *Sukkot* in relation to these dangers? Are we commanded to put ourselves out into nature despite the risks, or is there some deeper meaning behind it?

After all of the horrible consequences of Hurricane Irene, many people have been left struggling to rebuild their homes, communities and lives. Hurricane Irene has left in her wake many communities and families devastated by the realization that no matter how much work they put into protecting themselves and their homes, the elements are ultimately more powerful than all human efforts. What we as Jews can learn from this is just how important the holiday of *Sukkot* is and how relevant the homes of our ancestors are to our lives. On *Sukkot*, we are commanded to live in flimsy, non-element-proof homes that are susceptible to destruction from even the slightest rain and



wind. In fact, if our *sukkot* are too strong, they are not kosher. While our houses are a bit more stable, we can see that they are not indestructible and not always the safest means of protection.

This year, we can all appreciate what life was like for the Jews living in the desert. They never let their often unpleasant and dangerous living situations get in the way of their commitment to Judaism or their faith in *HaShem*. We are commanded to build *sukkot* and rejoice in them. This is to teach that, in good and bad times, we must unite as a community and find ways to enjoy life and be together as a community no matter what life throws at us. Living in *sukkot* teaches us to find pleasure in whatever comes our way. We can learn to be resilient and to better ourselves in times of terror. The holiday of *Sukkot* also gives us courage to embrace nature and to accept the mysterious ways of *HaShem* with love.

As *Sukkot* draws near, we can look forward to the opportunity ahead. Many people would say we are crazy to put ourselves in potential danger just to remember "some guys who lived in tents." But, this year we are not just doing this to remember our beloved ancestors. We celebrate in our *Sukkot* to show that we trust in *HaShem*. *HaShem* has given us the opportunity to show our love and devotion just by sitting in the *sukah*, smiling, laughing and remembering that *HaShem* is keeping us safe. I ask that this year when you sit in your *sukkot* enjoying beautiful meals and wonderful conversation you take a moment to recall how lucky and strong we are as the nation of *Bnei Yisrael* and as individuals.

*Shanah Tovah u-Metukah!*



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If your shul would like to receive *Ma'ayanei Torah*, or to sponsor an issue, please contact:

Ma'ayanot  
1650 Palisade Ave.  
Teaneck, NJ 07666  
201-833-4307  
Maayaneitorah@maayanot.org

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