

The Simcha of Water

Sukkos is called “Zman simchaseinu,” the time of our joy.

We understand why Sukkos is a Yom Tov of simcha. We sit in the sukkah, we take the lulav and esrog, we spend time with our families and guests, and we celebrate the Yom Tov. But there is something interesting about the greatest celebration that took place in the Beis Hamikdash on Sukkos. Chazal tell us, “מי שלא ראה שמחת בית השואבה לא ראה שמחה מימיו.” The Simchas Beis Hashoevah was the greatest simcha imaginable, and the focus of that celebration was the drawing of water for ניסוך המים.

Water? Water isn't exactly the first thing we think of when someone announces that the party is about to begin. Wine has a taste. Wine has an effect. Wine is naturally associated with simcha, as the pasuk says, “וַיֵּין יִשְׁמַח לִבָּב אָנוּשׁ.” But water is... water.

דרכים בשנה סוכות

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So why was water the source of such tremendous simcha?

Perhaps there is a deeper definition of simcha here. There is a type of simcha that comes from understanding. I understand something, everything suddenly falls into place, and I feel good. There is another kind of simcha that comes from inspiration. I hear a beautiful idea, I daven with extra kavannah, or I experience a moment of closeness to Hashem, and I feel uplifted.

But there is another kind of connection to Hashem that doesn't depend on either understanding or feeling. It is the simple knowledge that I belong to Him.

That is what water represents. Water has no particular taste. We don't drink it because we are looking for an experience. We drink it because we need it. It is simple, basic

and necessary. We don't have to be excited about water for it to keep us alive.

And perhaps that is why it represents such a deep level of simcha. The deepest connection to Hashem is not necessarily the one we feel most strongly. It is the connection that remains even when we don't feel anything at all.

The seforim hakedoshim explain that the avodah of Sukkos moves from something that surrounds us to something that becomes part of us. When we sit in the sukkah, we are surrounded by kedushah. The sukkah is an אור מקיף. It encompasses us even when we don't necessarily feel anything.

That is an important limud. We tend to measure our ruchniyus by our feelings. If I walked out of davening inspired, I assume I accomplished something. If I learned something and felt a real geshmak, I feel that something happened. But if I sat in the sukkah and didn't feel anything special,

I can wonder whether anything happened at all.

The sukkah tells us that we don't have to feel the kedushah for it to be real. You walk into the sukkah, and you are surrounded by Hashem's mitzvah. Whether you feel it or not.

This is also part of the avodah of the daled minim. The sukkah surrounds us with kedushah, while the daled minim are something we actually take into our hands and hold onto. The kedushah that first surrounds us begins to become something פנימי, something we carry with us.

The next step is for that kedushah to become part of us. What surrounds us begins to enter into us. The inspiration doesn't remain in the sukkah. It becomes part of the way we think, the way we speak and the way we live.

This also answers something fascinating about Simchas Beis Hashoevah. Chazal tell us that it began on the second night of Sukkos. On the first night, we had entered the

sukkah. We were surrounded by the kedushah. On the second night, we were already beginning to take that kedushah inward. Now we could appreciate the simcha of the water, the simple connection that doesn't depend on taste, excitement or inspiration.

That may be why the greatest simcha is connected specifically to water. The deepest connection to Hashem is not dependent on having a spiritual "high." Sometimes we daven and feel something. Sometimes we learn and feel inspired. And sometimes we do what we are supposed to do and feel... mamish nothing.

It still counts. Hashem is still there. The mitzvah is still real. And our connection is still intact.

We spend so much of our lives wanting answers. Why did this happen? Why didn't that work out? Why is this taking so long? Why is someone else where I thought I would be? There are questions we need to ask, and there are things

we should try to understand. But there is also a point where emunah means saying, "I don't understand, but I know Who is running the show."

There is tremendous simcha in that.

Sukkos comes and gives us seven days to live inside that idea. We leave our homes and enter a simple little sukkah. We sit there, eat, learn, talk, sing and have guests. We may not feel anything extraordinary every time we walk through the door.

But something extraordinary is happening. We are surrounded by kedushah. We take the daled minim into our hands. And slowly, that kedushah can become part of us.

Wine has a taste. Water doesn't. Yet on Sukkos, the water is what makes us dance.

Because the greatest simcha is not necessarily the simcha of understanding everything or feeling something all the time. It is the simcha of

knowing that even when I don't understand, I know Who I belong to.

And if we are being honest, that is worth more than any "high" will ever be.

Above the Ground

The gemara in Mesechta Rosh Hashana (11a) discusses the date of Yitzchak's birth. The opinion of the gemara is that the malachim came to visit Avrohom and Sarah on Pesach and that he was born the following Pesach is well known. This is proven from the fact that Avrohom was making ugos (Matzah) at the time. However, the gemara brings another lesser-known opinion that although the birth was on Pesach, but the day of the visit was actually Sukkos.

בפסח נולד יצחק, מנלן כדכתיב: "למועד אשוב אליך" אימת קאי וכו' אלא דקאי בחג - *It was taught in the baraisa: On Pesach Yitzchak was born. The Gemara asks: From where do we learn this? As it is written that the malach*

who informed Sarah that she would bear a son told Avraham: "At the appointed time [mo'ed] I will return to you, at this season, and Sarah shall have a son" (Bereishis 18:14). This is understood to mean: At the time of the next Yom Tov [mo'ed]. When did the malach say this? Etc. Rather, you must say that it was Sukkos, and he spoke about the Yom Tov that occurs in the month of Nissan, i.e., Pesach.

Some bring (eg. Rav Chaim Kanievski zt"l in Ta'ama Dikra on that possuk) a proof to this gemara based on the Midrash Rabba (Bamidbar Rabba 12:2): באברהם כתיב והשענו תחת העץ, שעשה להם סכה והקדוש ברוך הוא עשה סכות לבניו ביציאתם ממצרים כי בסכות הושבתי את בני ישראל וגו' - *And he reclined them under the tree- i.e. he made for them a Sukkah, and in this merit, Ha-shem made Sukkos for His children when they left Mitzrayim, I made the Bnei Yisroel live in Sukkas when I brought them out of the land of Mitzrayim.*

The question on this Midrash is obvious: if we understand that the tree that they sat under refers to the Sukkah, this would be problematic because as we know, the Mishna (Sukkah 1:2) teaches תחת האילן, העושה סכתו - a Sukkah that is directly beneath a tree is considered as if it is inside of a house and it is unfit. The reason is because the sukkah must be covered with s'chach that is not mechubar lekarka (connected to the ground).

There are different answers that have been offered. (The Ostrovtzer z"l has a fascinating answer based on the rules of bittul and how it pertains to a goy-ומובא בגליון מתורת הג"ר נחום נבנצל שליט"א בשם הגאון מאוסטרובצ'ה זיע"א שביאר דבזוה"ק איתא שאסור להכניס גוי לסוכה, ואמנם אאע"ה קיים כה"ת כולה אבל לא היה לו דין ישראל לקולא – ולכן לא היה לו מותר לישב בסוכה סתם, ולכן לקח אילן המחובר לקרקע וביטלו ברוב ענפים תלושים ע"י סוכה יא, א ובכה"ג יצא ידי חובה לכל

הצדדים כידוע מהפרמ"ג דאין דין ביטול ברוב בעכו"ם, -וא"כ לצד שהוא עכו"ם הסוכה Rav (פסולה ולא ישב בסוכה. Menachem Mendil Hager זט"ל (Tzemach Tzadik of Vizhnitz) offered the following idea. After Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, we are all elevated and now have the ability to leave the materialism, the earthiness of this world, raising ourselves a little bit higher. The way we accomplish this is by leaving our homes and entering into the sukkah, thus disconnecting from the *artziyus*- no longer being grounded into the earth, thus raising ourselves towards the Heavens. Avrohom Avinu did not need to undergo this avodah in order to accomplish this goal. Avrohom was able to do this on his own as he was never really connected to the *gashmiyus* of this world in the first place. He was a heavenly person and had already achieved this goal of disconnecting from below and raising himself up above. As a result, his sukkah was allowed to be

מחובר לקרקע , connected to the ground.

(The seforim hakedoshim teach us that one of the reasons why rikudim-dancing is so important is because as we lift up our feet off of the ground, we are doing the same thing: detaching from the ground and lifting ourselves heavenwards.)

I heard a story about a *hailiger* group of people in Auschwitz, together with their Rav, Rabbi Eliyahu Munk of Paris. It was the Yom Tov of Sukkos and the rav did not want that the mitzvah of Sukkah should be forgotten. Even though a tree is unfit for a sukkah, they sat under the tree during Sukkos in Auschwitz as a commemoration of the mitzvah of sitting in a sukkah, as if to say, "Ribono Shel Olam, this year we are under a tree but we ask that next year we will once again merit to fulfill the mitzvah properly in a kosher sukkah.

The thought struck me that according to our answer, these hailiger people in

Auschwitz, who were so fully detached from even the tiniest drop of any *gashmiyus*, fulfilled the mitzvah in the exact same manner as Avrohom Avinu.

The same Mishnah continues: סכה על גבי סכה, העליונה כשרה והתחתונה פסולה. רבי יהודה אומר, אם אין דיורין בעליונה התחתונה - if one established a sukkah atop another sukkah, the upper sukkah is kosher and the lower sukkah is possul. Rabbi Yehuda says: If there is no one living in the upper sukkah, the lower sukkah is kosher.

According to what we have said, we can explain this Mishnah as follows: The goal of Sukkos is to detach ourselves from this lower world and move ourselves upwards. If we remain in the "lower sukkah", i.e., down below; attached to the ground, we have not fulfilled the mitzvah. Rabbi Yehuda replied that the reality is that as people, we are still living down below. So what then is the deciding factor? , אם אין דיורין בעליונה התחתונה

כשרה "If there is no one living in the upper sukkah, the lower sukkah is kosher." We may in fact be down here below, but do we have other things taking up our head-space above us that cause a separation between us and Avinu sh'bashamayim?

The Yom Tov of Sukkos is our opportunity to enter into a time and (mind) space that is cleared of all mundane and be-come one with Hashem. May we be zocheh this Yom Tov to bask in the Shechinah, fully giving ourselves to Hashem.

זמן שמחתנו

While the Yom Tov of Sukkos has three different names (Chag, Asif and Sukkos), the Yom Tov is also referred to as **Zman Simchaseinu**. Sukkos is synonymous with joy and happiness. A mere look at the calendar and the timing of the Yom Tov could not be better. After the *Yomim Noraim/Days of Awe*, who

would not be able to appreciate such joy?

But how are we to understand the way in which we observe the *simcha* of our Yom Tov? Imagine having a conversation with a neighbor and telling him that you've been through some trying times recently and now you will "kick back and really enjoy". Naturally he asks what you have planned, and you go on to explain that you will be temporarily relocating into a frail hut. "Aha! So that is how you Jews celebrate happiness, I get it!" And if that is not enough, in the middle of Yom Tov we read the words of Koheles 2:2 "ולשמחה מה זה עשה" *"and of joy, what does it accomplish?"* Are we meant to be happy or not?

Dovid HaMelech writes in Tehillim (16:11) תודיעני ארח חיים שבע שמחות את -*You will reveal to me the path of life, the fullness of joy in Your presence*. The Midrash explains that the Yomim Noraim teach us

the "way of life", and the "fullness of joy" is shown to us through the observance of Sukkos. Chazal are teaching us that there is a cause and effect association between Rosh

HaShana- Yom Kippur and Sukkos. (*Lihavdil*), Just as one can have a much greater appreciation for a vacation after working through a very hard season, Chazal are telling us that Sukkos will be enjoyed that much more so after truly experiencing the Yomim Noraim.

Rav Dessler takes the aforementioned possuk in Tehillim a step further, linking the months of Tammuz, Av and Ellul to this possuk. First we go through days of despair, recalling the *churban*, and in general feeling insecure and unsafe with the world around us. At that point, we are no longer disillusioned with the security that the world offers (or doesn't offer) us. Continuing through time, we arrive at Elul. It is because of the realization that our true security is in

the *Eibeshter* and no one else that we are able to come to Him in *teshuva* and renewal. Continuing on our odyssey, we are now prepared to arrive at Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur. The final stop in this journey of course will be Sukkos, the *zman* of *simcha*.

This authentic *simcha* that the Torah talks about can only be achieved after all of our illusions have been purged. Once we realize that it is HaShem, and only Him that gives us our protection, can we now enter even a flimsy hut and feel secure in our knowledge that HaShem watches over us. What's more- the flimsy hut suddenly takes on a whole new experience. We now realize that we are in the most secure environment possible.

If we look at the words of *L'Dovid HaShem ori* (*Tehillim* 27:5), that we have been reciting from the beginning of Elul until Simchas Torah, we can gain understanding into the

reason we have the custom to recite this. כי יצפני –בסכה ביום רעה *In the day of trouble He will hide me in His sukkah*. HaShem will hide us- where? In a sukkah! Not a house, but rather, a sukkah. Similarly, when we ask HaShem to spread over us His protection of peace, we ask for *Sukkas shlomecha*- HaShem's *kinderlach* understand that true protection is not by the strength and power of man's might, but rather by HaShem Himself. This is what the Sukkah symbolizes.

In *bentching* of Sukkos, we add in an additional "*harachaman*"- we ask HaShem to re-erect the fallen Sukkah of Dovid. The Maharal explains this with the same approach that we've used here. We don't ask for the House of Dovid to be rebuilt but rather his sukkah. A kingdom is called a house to indicate its power and strength, because a house would typically be sturdy and strong. Dovid's kingdom does not rely on this. It is referred to as a "*Sukkas*

Dovid" because its protection comes from HaShem.

We now understand why we read *Koheles* on Sukkos. It is to remind us that true happiness is not when the harvest has been reaped and our barns are filled to capacity, but rather when we place our full faith only in HaShem. שבע שמחות *- the fullness of joy*, can only be realized if and when it is את פניך *- in HaShem's presence*.

The King's Gift

The Gemara in Mesechta Yoma (86b) notes a *stirah*/contradiction. On the one hand, we find that *teshuva* is so great that one's intentional sins become like unintentional sins. Yet, in another comment of the Gemara, we find that when one does *teshuva*, one's intentional sins become like merits. The Gemara resolves this by explaining that it depends if the *teshuva* was done *m'ahava*/because we love

of HaShem, or m'yirah/out of fear of HaShem.

After working on ourselves for so long now, it may be quite difficult to read yet another vort on teshuva, but let's take another look, this time through the Yom Tov of Sukkos. When taking the right approach, one can achieve teshuva m'ahava.

From a look at our calendar, it's obvious that Sukkos follows Yom Kippur so closely because it is necessary for our completion of teshuva. In the middle of Yom Tov, we have Hoshana Rabba which is known as *chosam b'toch chosam*, as this is the final teshuva. But what exactly is the teshuva of sukkos?

I heard a *mashul* that can help explain this. The king needed to pass through a certain town. All the residents, men, women and children came out hanging their banners and cheering for their king. Suddenly, there was a great silence. A man had hurled a stone directly at the king's head. The king was bleeding. No one knew

what to say or do. The people were stunned. How could one even think of hurting their beloved king, let alone actually doing it?!? The man was seized and taken to be hung. In the midst of hanging him, the king called out STOP! Release this man! No one knew why. The king spoke with the man, telling him that he would be elevated to the position of advisor to the king. He would now live within the royal palace with his family, dressing in the finest and eating only the best, never having another financial worry.

At first, he was ecstatic and elated with the new job without even thinking why he was being treated this way, but then it hit him like a ton of bricks. His guilt for his previous action was too strong to bear. Yet, the king was showering upon him gift after gift. With each gift he would ask himself why he deserved it after what he had done. Now he truly regretted his action to the king that showed him such continuous unadulterated love.

On Erev Yom Kippur we are told to eat a large seudah. However, halacha tells us that this meal should be eaten after Mincha, so that we first say "*ashamnu*" and the "*al cheits*". Can one that honestly looks at the words being said, even have an appetite to eat afterwards?!? Yet we are told to eat. After Yom Kippur, we are urged "*lech echol b'simcha*". Next, we are told to enter into the sukkah. One cannot help but look around the table at his beautiful family, dressed in the Yom Tov finest, creative decorations, the first class tableware, delicious foods and lively *nigunim* hosted by none other than the "*hailiger ushpizin*".

It is right there in the sukka, under the "*tzeil dehemnusa*", that we can easily ask ourselves if we are even worthy of all the *chesed* that the *Aibershter* gives us after the year we've turned in. It is in the sukka that we feel the strong *ahava* that HaShem shows us. It is there that we can come to reciprocate to Avinu

Malkeinu by finally returning to Him with TESHUVA M'AHAVA!!!

One Breath

One of the major focuses of the Yom Tov is the concept of *ahava v'reyus*. This is shown when the *arava* that has no taste or even smell is taken, and joined together with the other three species. The midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 30:12) tells us that this hints to the concept of all the *yidden* joining together no matter what stripe or type, for the purpose of showing true love for another *Yid*.

Another place that this can be seen is from the R'Eliezer's (*Sukkah* 11b) opinion that the sukkah that we sat inside of in the *midbar* were actually the *ananei hakavod*/clouds of glory. It is well known that the great character trait of Aharon Hakohein אוהב שלום ורודף שלום was אוהב את הבריות –he had a deep love for all of *Klal Yisroel*. He would chase down any opportunity to keep people together and

preserve unity. It is no wonder that when he died, the *ananei hakavod* went away as well.

Aside from the numerous halachos governing how to make a proper sukkah, and what is kosher for s'chach, and how high the walls must be etc, there are also halchos that dictate the proper behavior in a sukkah. For example, after bringing in the food to the sukkah, the empty/dirty dishes must be removed. The sukkah may not contain any garbage and must be kept as beautiful as possible. Just as one may not physically keep any waste inside the sukkah, one may also not talk lashon hara inside the sukkah. Of course, it is never permitted, but one must be that much more careful inside.

Examining lashon hara a bit more, we can see a strong connection to the *ananei hakavod* and why it is so detrimental to speaking in the sukkah.

One of the consequences of the *tzoraas* that comes

from speaking *loshon hara* is the requirement to dwell in isolation; being sent *chutz lamachaneh*. Chazal explain that this is *midah kinegged midah*. By speaking badly about others, we are creating divisiveness between people, causing people to be alienated from their friends. The Torah wants this person to experience the same loneliness that he created with his words by sending him out.

The Rizhiner Rebbe zt"l shared a tremendous insight into understanding the *ananei hakavod* What connection does *kavod*/glory have with these clouds? The simple *pshat* of course, is that these clouds gave honor to *Klal Yisroel* by surrounding them.

The Rebbe offered a new *pshat* based on the science of how clouds are formed.

(Some science 101: Air can hold just so much moisture before it becomes saturated. Once humidity hits 100%, the water will

begin to condense out of the air into droplets or crystals of ice, depending of course on the temperature. Warm air can hold more water vapor than cold air. As the air cools, water is visibly squeezed out into the air. This can be seen in the winter time when we speak outside and you can actually see your breath. The warm, moist air that we've breathed out is suddenly cooled, and it can no longer hold the moisture, so the water condenses out of the air into the vapor that we see. A small amount of vapor from our breath will quickly disperse into the air surrounding, and on a much more massive scale, clouds can be formed.)

The Rebbe explains that the clouds surrounding *Klal Yisroel* were actually created by the collective breaths of *Klal Yisroel*! This happened when the breaths would fuse together, forming great clouds. HOWEVER, when people don't get along, their vapors cannot fuse and become one. It is only

through *achdus* that *ananim* come to be.

We now understand why they were called *ananei hakavod*. There was no greater honor for *Klal Yisroel* than the fact that 600,000 Yidden demonstrated such a high level of love for one another. Furthermore, not only did these clouds give *kavod*, these clouds were actually created as a direct result of the mutual *kavod* that they had for one another- מפני שנהגו כבוד זה לזה.

One who speaks *loshon hara* must be removed from within the *machane*, the place of unity under the *ananim*. These very clouds that were created by unity cannot tolerate one that tries to destroy it.

Inside of the sukkah, we are supposed to focus on the reasons why we are sitting there. If we had the clouds because we spoke positively about the next person, it goes without saying that the proper

respect for a sukkah is to maintain the halachos of *lashon hara* and to be extra careful.

הושענא רבה

During the *hakafos* of Hoshana Rabba, we circle the *bimah* seven times. The Yerushalmi comments that this is done לזכר ליריחו/in memory of the seven times that Yericho was circled. We also make mention of Yericho in the *tefillos* that we say on Hoshana Rabba.

The connection can be explained as follows: Just as the seven circuits around Yericho had the power of causing the mighty walls to come crashing down, our *tefillos* and *hakafos* as well can also cause the mightiest walls and barriers to collapse and come crashing down.

There are many types of walls that get erected during the course of the year, but the toughest of them all are the inner walls that we erect between us and HaShem. R'Elazar

comments (Mesechta Brachos 32b) that from the time of the *churban* and onwards, there is a wall of iron that has been erected between Klal Yisroel and HaShem. Furthermore, the gates of *tefillah* have been locked making it that much more difficult to connect. Hoshana Rabbah is an incredible opportunity to break down even those walls through *tefilla* and proper *teshuva*.

The story is told of the engagement of the daughter of the great Baron Rothchild, to the son of the poorest tailor in town. Prior to announcing the engagement, the Baron sat down with the prospective *mechutan* to discuss the young couple's finances. "I will give the couple a mansion here and a summer home there, a full staff of servants and of course unlimited access to my bank accounts for all their needs", said the Baron. "And what will you give?" The poor tailor replied that he didn't have the wherewithal to give anything of the sort. The Baron responded that

while he wasn't expecting an equal partnership, he did expect that tailor do his part, which the Baron estimated as a minimum of 10,000 shilling. The tailor once again responded that even if he would mend every ripped sock in town, he wouldn't be able to come close to those funds. "Borrow it from someone", said the Baron. With no choice, the tailor agreed and exited the meeting. Moments later there was a knock on the Baron's door. The tailor was back. "Baron Rothchild, I am here to request a loan of 10,000 shilling for the wedding of my son!"

The seforim explain that during the Yomim Noraim, surely we all made promises to HaShem as part of our bargaining. Now is the time to ask HaShem to give us the wherewithal to make good on those promises.

שמחת תורה

וימת שם משה עבד ה' בארץ מואב על פי ה' (לד:ה)

So Moshe, servant of HaShem died there, in the land of Moav, by the mouth of HaShem (34:5)

אני מאמין באמונה שלמה שכל התורה המצויה עתה בידינו היא הנתונה למשה ברבנו עליו השלום *I believe with perfect faith that the entire Torah that is now in our possession is the same that was given to Moshe Rabbeinu ע"ה.*

The *mishna* in *Sanhedrin* (90a) includes the belief in the divinity of the Torah, meaning that it was dictated by HaShem to Moshe, as an essential element of Yiddishkeit. The *Gemara* (ibid. 99a) goes on to say that this means that even if a person were to say that a single *passuk* in all of the Torah was written by Moshe on his own, and not dictated by HaShem, he lacks this essential belief. Accordingly, Moshe Rabbeinu's authorship applies to each and every *passuk* in the Torah.

The *Gemara* in *Masechta Menachos* (30a) discusses the question of who wrote

the final eight *pesukim* of the Torah. The *passuk* states that **Vayomos shom Moshe- and Moshe died there**. Can it be that Moshe wrote these words if he was still alive at the time? At that moment, the words were not true!

The *Gemara* gives two answers: Indeed, the final eight *pesukim* were authored by Yehoshua and *not* Moshe. The second answer is that Moshe wrote it. If you will ask how it could be, because, after all, Moshe was alive at the time and he would not write a lie, the *gemara* answers that Moshe wrote it "*bidema*" with his tears. (To avoid any question, the Zohar offers yet a third answer: Moshe had already died, and HaShem brought him back to life to finish writing these last eight *pesukim*- see Malbim for a beautiful *pshat* on the *passuk*- *Toras HaShem temima*, the Torah is complete, *meshivas nafesh*- because HaShem brought back the *nefesh* of

Moshe to complete the last eight *pesukim*.)

The second answer is difficult to understand. Sure it is an emotional event to think about one's own death, but this still does not answer our question. As emotional as he may have been thinking about the future, it is still not yet true!

The Baal Shem Tov offers a most fascinating insight into this *Gemara* which literally sheds new light on the entire Torah. The word *bidema* does not necessarily mean tears. In the terminology of the *gemara*, "*bidema*" can mean "a mixture". Accordingly, the *gemara* is answering that the last eight *pesukim* were in fact written by Moshe, but as a mixture. HaShem gave Moshe the letters to write. When they were written by Moshe, they had no meaning. Posthumously they were rearranged to read *Vayomos Shom Moshe*.

The Torah is so vast that one can read the Torah,

and re-read it over and over again, and still find a novelty each and every time. The Rishonim tell us that the Torah has no *nekudos* (vowels) because this would constrict the Torah. The Torah would no longer have the ability to be read in a different manner.

This brings us to a new understanding of a well-known *gemara* in *Masechta Shabbos*. A prospective convert approached Hillel asking to be converted on the basis of his accepting only the *Torah shebichsav* (written Torah) but not the *Torah Shebal peh* (Oral Torah). Hillel accepted him and proceeded to teach him. The *Gemara* relates that on day one, he taught him the *aleph-beis*. On the following day, he switched around the order and first taught him the final letter *taf* and continued until *aleph*. The convert questioned him, "But yesterday you told me the opposite?" Hillel responded that yesterday you accepted it based on my say so, so accept

today's as well. In the end, the convert accepted the entire Torah.

What is the give and take of this story? We can attempt to explain this as follows: The convert was willing to accept the written Torah because he saw it in front of him. But when it came to the Oral Torah, he questioned its validity. "Where is this written, who says?" Hillel proceeded to teach him the aleph-bais. If you read the letters in the traditional manner, you are right; the Torah seems to be missing a lot of information. But the next day, Hillel showed him how to turn the letters around, how to reconfigure the letters of the Torah to give brand new meanings and open up entire new worlds. Upon seeing and understanding this, the convert was able to see that all was contained within the Torah and he was now willing to accept the entire Torah.

When we hear it said about someone that "they know the entire Torah backwards and forwards", this does

not merely mean that they have it clear. It means that any which way you show it to them, there is a new *chiddush* to be gleaned.

Hafoch bah vehafoch bah, dikuli bah- keep on turning it over again and again, it's all there. (We now can also understand why upon the completion of the Torah, we lift it backwards for all to see.)

Good Yom Tov,

מרדכי ע. אפפעל