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Moses' Death, Moses' Life

And so Moses dies, alone on a mountain with God as he had been all those years ago when, as a shepherd in Midian, he caught sight of a bush in flames and heard the call that changed his life and the moral horizons of the world.

It is a scene affecting in its simplicity. There are no crowds. There is no weeping. The sense of closeness yet distance is almost overwhelming. He sees the land from afar but has known for some time that he will never reach it. Neither his wife nor his children are there to say goodbye. They disappeared from the narrative long before. His sister Miriam and his brother Aaron, with whom he shared the burdens of leadership for so long, have predeceased him. His disciple Joshua has become his successor. Moses has become the lonely man of faith, except that with God no man, or woman, is lonely even if they are alone.

It is a profoundly sad moment, yet the obituary the Torah gives him - whether Joshua wrote it,

or whether he wrote it himself at God's behest with tears in his eyes¹ - is unsurpassed:

Never again did there arise a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to display in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and all his servants and all his land, and for all the mighty acts and awesome sights that Moses displayed in the sight of all Israel. (Deut. 34:10-12)

Moses rarely figures in the lists people make from time to time of the most influential people in history. He is harder to identify with than Abraham in his devotion, David in his charisma, or Isaiah in his symphonies of hope. The contrast between Abraham's and Moses' death could not be more pointed. Of Abraham, the Torah says, "Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people" (Gen. 25:8). Abraham's death was serene. Though he had been through many trials, he had lived to see the first fulfillment of the promises God had given him. He had a child, and he had acquired at least the first plot of land in Israel. In the long journey of his descendants he had taken the first step. There is a sense of closure.

By contrast, Moses' old age is anything but serene. In the last month of his life he challenged the people with undiminished vigor and unvarnished candor. At the very moment that they were getting ready to cross the Jordan and enter the land, Moses warned them of the challenges ahead. The greatest trial, he said, would not be poverty but affluence, not slavery but freedom, not homelessness in the desert but the comfort of home. Reading these words, one is reminded of Dylan Thomas' poem, "Do not go gentle into that good night." There is as much passion in his words in his hundred and twentieth year as at any earlier

stage of his life. This is not a man ready to retire. Until the very end he continued to challenge both the people and God.

What do we learn from the death of Moses?

[1] For each of us, even for the greatest, there is a Jordan we will not cross, a promised land we will not enter, a destination we will not reach. That is what Rabbi Tarfon meant when he said: It is not for you to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it.² What we began, others will continue. What matters is that we undertook the journey. We did not stand still.

[2] "No man knows his burial place" (Deut. 34:6). What a contrast between Moses and the heroes of other civilizations whose burial places become monuments, shrines, places of pilgrimage. It was precisely to avoid this that the Torah insists explicitly that no one knows where Moses is buried. We believe that the greatest mistake is to worship human beings as if they were gods. We admire human beings; we do not worship them. That difference is anything but small.

[3] God alone is perfect. That is what Moses wanted people never to forget. Even the greatest human is not perfect. Moses sinned. We still do not know what his sin was - there are many opinions. But that is why God told him he would not enter the Promised Land. No human is infallible. Perfection belongs to God alone. Only when we honor this essential difference between heaven and earth can God be God and humans, human.

Nor does the Torah hide Moses' sin. "Because you did not sanctify me ..." (Num. 20:12). The Torah does not hide anyone's sin. It is fearlessly honest about the greatest of the great. Bad things happen when we try to hide people's sins. That is why there have been so many recent scandals in the world of religious Jews, some sexual, some financial, some of

other kinds. When religious people hide the truth they do so from the highest of motives. They seek to prevent a *chillul Hashem*. The result, inevitably, is a greater *chillul Hashem*. Such sanctimoniousness, denying the shortcomings of even the greatest, leads to consequences that are ugly and evil and turn decent people away from religion. The Torah does not hide people's sins. Neither may we.

[4] There is more than one way of living a good life. Even Moses, the greatest of men, could not lead alone. He needed the peacemaking skills of Aaron, the courage of Miriam and the support of the seventy elders. We should never ask: Why am I not as great as X? We each have something, a skill, a passion, a sensitivity, that makes, or could make, us great. The greatest mistake is trying to be someone else instead of being yourself. Do what you are best at, then surround yourself with people who are strong where you are weak.

[5] Never lose the idealism of youth. The Torah says of Moses that at the age of 120, "his eye was undimmed and his natural energy unabated" (Deut. 34:7). I used to think these were two complementary phrases until I realized that the first is the explanation of the second. Moses' "eye was undimmed" means, he never lost the passion for justice that he had as a young man. It is there, as vigorous in Deuteronomy as it was in Exodus. We are as young as our ideals. Give way to cynicism and you rapidly age.

[6] At the burning bush, Moses said to God: "I am not a man of words. I am heavy of speech and tongue." By the time we reach Devarim, the book named "Words," Moses has become the most eloquent of prophets. Some are puzzled by this. They should not be. God chose one who was not a man of words, so that when he spoke, people realized that *it was not he who was speaking but God who was speaking through him*. What he spoke were not his

words but God's words. That is why He chose a couple who could not have children - Abraham and Sarah - to become parents of the first Jewish child. That is why he chose a people not conspicuous for their piety to become God's witnesses to the world. *The highest form of greatness is so to open ourselves to God that his blessings flow through us to the world.* That is how the priests blessed the people. It was not their blessing. They were the channel of God's blessing. The highest achievement to which we can aspire is so to open ourselves to others and to God in love that something greater than ourselves flows through us.

[7] Moses defended the people. Did he like them? Did he admire them? Was he liked by them? The Torah leaves us in no doubt as to the answers to those questions. Yet he defended them with all the passion and power at his disposal. Even when they had sinned. Even when they were ungrateful to God. Even when they made a Golden Calf. He risked his life to do so. He said to God: "And now, forgive them, and if not, blot me out of the book you have written" (Ex. 32:32). According to the Talmud God taught Moses this lesson at the very outset of his career. When Moses said about the people, "They will not believe in me," God said, "They are the believers children of believers, and in the end it will be you who does not believe."³ The leaders worthy of admiration are those who defend the people: even the non-orthodox, even the secular, even those whose orthodoxy is a different shade from theirs. The people worthy of respect are those who give respect. Those who hate will be hated, those who look down on others will be looked down on, and those who condemn will be condemned. That is a basic principle of Judaism: *middah kenegged middah*. The people who are great are those who help others to become great. Moses taught the Jewish people how to become great.

The greatest tribute the Torah gives Moses is to call him *eved Hashem*, the servant of God. That is why the Rambam writes that we can all

be as great as Moses.⁴ Because we can all serve. We are as great as the causes we serve, and when we serve with true humility, a Force greater than ourselves flows through us, bringing the Divine presence into the world.

1. Baba Batra 15a.
2. Avot 2:16.
3. Shabbat 97a.
4. Hilkhhot Teshuvah 5:2.



From Sinai to Jerusalem

In the final parashah of the Torah, Moshe takes leave of his people by blessing them:

*And this is the blessing with which Moshe, the man of God, blessed the children of Israel [just] before his death. He said: "God came from Sinai and shone forth from **Se'ir** to them; He appeared from Mount **Paran** ... (Devarim 32:2)*

As a preface to the blessings he is about to bestow upon them, Moshe makes reference to two specific geographical locations, two places that have been mentioned before but whose significance he does not explain: Se'ir and Paran. Rashi, drawing upon earlier traditions¹, fills in the blanks for us:

*...and shone forth from **Se'ir** to them: [Why did He come from Se'ir?] Because God first offered the children*

of Esav [who dwelled in Se'ir] that they accept the Torah, but they did not want [to accept it].

...from Mount Paran: [Why did God then come from Paran?] Because He went there and offered the children of Yishmael [who dwelled in Paran] to accept the Torah, but they [also] did not want [to accept it]. (Rashi, Devarim 32:2)

Rashi, always a sensitive reader of the text, explains these cryptic references to long-forgotten places through the application of a well-known tradition that has clear textual grounding: Yishmael, son of Hagar and Avraham, “settled in the Paran wilderness” after he and his mother were banished from Avraham’s tent (Bereishit 21:21), while Esav’s domain in Se’ir was well-known to this generation of Israelites, who had been instructed to steer well clear of the inheritance given to the other son of Yitzchak (Devarim 2:5). Rashi deftly weaves the textual associations of Se’ir and Paran together with the tradition regarding their unwillingness to accept the Torah: Each of these sons of Avraham had been given the opportunity to become the People of the Book, as it were, but each had rejected the offer when they found out what was involved.

This approach stands in stark contrast to the approach of the Children of Israel. At the foot of Mount Sinai, when offered the Torah, they responded without hesitation: “*Na’aseh v’nishma*” – “we will do and we will hear”. They accepted the Torah “sight unseen”, as it were, without question, without consideration of the pragmatics, of the demands that their acceptance of this Divine gift would entail.

The relationship between God and the Children of Israel is not dependent upon the content of the Torah; rather, the Torah is an expression of the unique relationship between them. This

relationship, also described by Rashi, in the verse that prefaces Moshe’s parting blessings:

“And this is the blessing with which Moshe, the man of God, blessed the children of Israel [just] before his death. He said: “God came from Sinai...””

He came out toward them when they came to stand at the foot of the mountain, as a bridegroom goes forth to greet his bride, as it is said, “[And Moshe brought the people forth] toward God” (Shmot 19:17). We learn from this that God came out toward them. (Rashi, Devarim 32:2)

In a sense, when the Jews accepted the Torah, they entered into a covenant with God, taking a vow similar to those of marriage. When a man and woman are wed, they do not know what fortune (or perhaps misfortune) awaits; their future is a book that is as yet unwritten. Their marriage is not based upon any assurance of what the content of that book will be; it is based upon their love for one another, and the decision that they wish to share the journey into the unknown. Rashi contrasts the pragmatic relationship, the aborted relationship between God and the nations that live in Se’ir and Paran, with the loving relationship entered into by those who declared “*na’aseh v’nishma*”, who had no expectation of reading the content of the book before making the loving commitment to the future of their relationship. Esav and Yishmael demanded to read the fine print before entering into the covenant; what they read seemed to them excessively demanding, and they declined God’s offer. The sons of Yaakov, on the other hand, had complete trust in the One who had offered them the covenant, and wanted nothing more than the loving relationship that this covenant would foster.

There may be a deeper level to this teaching:

The names of the two protagonists, Esav and Yishmael, are suspiciously similar to the two words said by the children of Israel, *na'aseh v'nishma* (we will do we will listen). Taking careful note of the roots of these Hebrew words unlocks layers of meaning that might be overlooked in translations: The word *na'aseh* (we will do) shares the root *asah* with the name of Yitzchak's son Esav, while *nishma* (we will listen) shares its root, *shama*, with the name Yishmael.²

There are several conclusions that we might draw from this etymological lesson: On the one hand, we might see within it an emphasis on the fidelity of the Jews versus the hesitation of those who perhaps might lay claim to some part of the inheritance of Avraham: The Children of Israel succeeded, in declaring *na'aseh v'nishma*, where the children of Esav and Yishmael had failed. Furthermore, we may say that in using these precise words, the Children of Israel channeled the spiritual power and potential that the others had forfeited.

On the other hand, as we approach the final verses of the Five Books of Moshe - and begin again, returning to Genesis, to Bereishit, to Creation, perhaps there is a new hope. All of mankind was created in the image of God; the entire world was created with spiritual potential. The message of the last chapter of Devarim leads directly to the message of the first chapter of Bereishit: those who succeeded in creating this unique, loving bond with God, and those who failed. We are given the opportunity to pause and wonder, to pause and hope, that the reality of the past does not dictate the destiny of the future. We do not rest on the laurels of the blessings of *V'Zot HaBrachah* and the knowledge that our relationship with God is unique; instead, we wait for the day that all peoples of the earth will embrace the word of God and live in tranquility.

Also the strangers that join themselves to God to serve Him and to love the

name of God, to be His servants... I will bring them to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer; their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be acceptable upon My altar, for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Thus declares the Almighty God who gathers the dispersed of Israel: Yet I will gather others to him, beside those that are gathered. (Yishayahu 56:6-8)

Chazak Chazak V'nitchazek!

For a more in-depth analysis see: <http://arikahn.blogspot.co.il/2015/09/audio-and-essays-vzot-habracha.html>

1. See Sifri Dvarim V'zot Habracha Piska 343.
2. This teaching is found in the commentary of the Vilna Gaon in his *Aderet Eliyahu*, Dvarim 32:2, and in numerous places in the writings of the Hid"ah, who attributes the idea to the *Torat Haim* (authored by R. Abraham Hayyim ben R. Naftali Tzvi Hirsch Schor, d. 1632) commentary to Talmud Bavli Avoda Zara 2b.



The National Heirloom

Every little Jewish child learns this verse: *Torah tzivah lanu Moshe morashah kehillas Yaakov*. The Torah Moshe commanded us is an heirloom for the congregation of Yaakov." Sometimes the word *morashah* is translated as an inheritance or a heritage, but this is not precise. The exact translation of the word *morashah* is heirloom.

An heirloom is something we hold precious and dear, something we cherish because it connects us to the treasured past, something we want to pass along to future generations, just as we have received it ourselves from earlier generations.

The Torah is the heirloom of the Jewish people. It is the sublime heirloom, our eternal connection to the Almighty. In the words of the Psalmist (*Tehillim* 144:15), "Fortunate is the nation that has it so, fortunate is the nation that God is their Lord."

What is an heirloom to the gentile world? I would like to recount a story I once read about a woman who went on her first deer hunt and shot her first deer. She made laborious preparations for this momentous event. She studied a stack of books about deer hunting, and she learned how to shoot a 30-30 Model 94 Winchester rifle that had been handed down in the family for generations.

So what was her heirloom? A 30-30 Model 94 Winchester rifle. Her great-grandfather passed it on lovingly to her grandfather, and her grandfather gave it to her. On the morning of the hunt, she took the rifle apart and lovingly cleaned and oiled it until it gleamed. And then she went out and shot her first deer. A thrilling moment.

How fortunate are we that the Torah is our heirloom! How fortunate are the Jewish people that God is their Lord!

His Finest Moment

The Torah concludes with a stirring eulogy for Moshe, the lawgiver of the Jewish people, "Never again has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moshe, whom God knew face to face; all the signs and wonders that God sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants and all his land; all the strong hands and great awesome deeds Moshe displayed before the eyes of all Israel."

Each of these phrases, as interpreted by Rashi, recalls a specific aspect of Moshe's greatness, leading step by step to the climax of his epitaph: "before the eyes of all Israel," that he had the courage to smash the *Luchos*, Tablets of the Ten Commandments, in full view of the Jewish people. When all was said and done, this was the ultimate expression of Moshe's greatness, the most superb act he ever performed.

What was so magnificent about this act that it transcended his Torah and all the great miracles he performed?

The *Ateres Mordechai* offers a profound insight. Before we begin a project, whether it is a book or a building or anything else, we can consider it critically and objectively. But once the project gets underway, we are no longer so objective. And as the project progresses, our objectivity progressively shrinks - until it completely disappears. After we have written our book, we are so invested that we no longer want to entertain any critical thoughts. We don't want to hear that we made a mistake in this or that we shouldn't have written that. We go to extremes to defend against our critics, although we might have made the same arguments ourselves before the fact.

And what if we publish a work on the Torah or even a single *shtickel Torah*, an original Torah homily? We are so proud and pleased with ourselves that we will twist and turn and squirm and contort ourselves every which way to make the unworkable work.

Can we imagine then how Moshe must have felt when he came down the mountain with the Ten Commandments? This was what he had been working toward for years. He had sacrificed for these Tablets. He had spent forty days in Heaven without food or drink fending off the angels and securing the Tablets for the Jewish people. This was his magnum opus, his life's work.

Now he comes down the mountain and sees the people worshipping the Golden Calf. He knows instinctively what he must do. He knows that the people are unworthy and that he must smash the Tablets.

And what about all the toil and effort he had invested in them?

He could easily have rationalized to himself, "All right, the people clearly don't deserve the Tablets now, but maybe things will change. What's the point of breaking the *Luchos* if I might need them again in a day or two? Perhaps I should just put them aside without showing them to the people until they are again deserving. Why ruin a good pair of Tablets?"

But Moshe did not do this. He had absolute integrity. He disregarded all the efforts he had invested in the Tablets. He did not consider that his life's work was going to waste. Truth demanded that he break them, and he did not hesitate to do so.

This was the ultimate virtue the Torah could ascribe to Moshe. The truth, the integrity, the honesty, the clarity of vision uncolored by personal considerations. This was his greatest accomplishment.

I heard a beautiful comment along these lines from Rav Mordechai Gifter. The Talmud tells us (*Kiddushin* 57a) that Shimon the Amsonite used to develop a secondary meaning from every single occurrence of the Hebrew particle *es* in the Torah. For instance, in the commandment of honoring parents there is an *es*, from which he derived the inclusion of older siblings.

One day, he turned his attention to the verse (*Devarim* 6:13), "*Es Hashem Elokecha tira*. You shall fear God your Lord." All of a sudden, he said, "This cannot be. There is no secondary recipient of the fear we must feel for Hashem." Therefore, he recanted on all his original

derivations, thousand and thousands of insights, because his rule could not be applied consistently to the entire Torah.

And then Rabbi Akiva came along and taught that even in this there could be secondary recipients – Torah scholars! They are worthy of sharing the reverence for the Divine.

Wonderful.

But why, asks Rav Gifter, couldn't Shimon the Amsonite think of this solution? Why was this specialist on the *es* particle stumped while Rabbi Akiva was able to figure it out?

The answer, says Rav Gifter, is that Rabbi Akiva saw the way Shimon the Amsonite dealt with this problem. He saw the tremendous devotion to truth, the inviolable intellectual integrity, the willingness to forfeit many years of effort and creativity if there was a problem with the reasoning. When Rabbi Akiva saw that a Torah scholar could reach such a level of integrity and honesty in defense of the truth of Torah, he realized that Torah scholars too can share in the reverence for the Divine. They can be included in "*Es Hashem Elokecha tira*."

Customarily, a glass is broken at a Jewish wedding. What is the reason for this custom? The reason most commonly given is to recall the destruction of Yerushalayim during times of rejoicing. One commentator connects this custom to the breaking of the Tablets of the Commandments. Why do we need to be reminded of this event during a wedding?

Perhaps it is because the breaking of the Tablets was such an act of profound honesty and integrity on the part of Moshe. In order for a marriage to work, there is also a need for extraordinary honesty and integrity on the part of both husband and wife. In case of discussion or disagreement, both have to speak and act with absolute honesty and integrity, to be straight and aboveboard, to do what is right rather than what is comfortable and

convenient. Both have to be ready to admit their mistakes rather than stand on their pride. Both need to be prepared to let go of their preconceived notions and prejudices and work toward the common good. Both have to be willing to face the truth.

These are not easy demands, but if husband and wife want to gain the most happiness possible from their marriage, they have to find the strength of character in themselves to do these things. The reminder of the breaking of the Tablets is meant to give them courage. If Moshe was ready to break them and let go of all his hopes and dreams for the sake of truth, these two people can find a way to build their marriage on a foundation of truth.



One Extra Day

Greetings from the Holy City of Jerusalem!

Throughout the week of Sukkot we are instructed to offer a total of 70 bulls in the Temple, but on Shmini Atzeret we offer only one (Talmud - Sukkah 55b). The Midrash (Tanchuma - Pinchas 15) offers the following parable:

There was once a king who made lavish banquets for all his servants several days in the year. But on the final day he told his most beloved and dedicated servant, "Make for me a small meal so that I can have pleasure from you." Like the king in this parable, God, the King of the Universe, tells His servants to

prepare an 'international party' on Sukkot and to bring sacrifices on behalf of ourselves and the 70 nations of the world. But on the final day, Shmini Atzeret, He requests us to prepare a small meal for his beloved people of Israel.

The question can be raised: Why would God request just a *small* meal, rather than a giant feast for this unique and special occasion?

The Bnei Yissaschar (Vol.2, Ma'amarim on Chodesh Tishrei 13:1) provides a beautiful answer to this question. He explains that God specifically requests only a small meal with Israel because it is not the meal that is of importance! God requests a day for us to be close to Him, and therefore asks that we prepare a small meal and eat it hurriedly so that that we can spend more time connecting to Him and enjoying the special connection. (We see this in practice on Shmini Atzeret, particularly in the Land of Israel where only one day Yom Tov is observed, as we spend most of the time in synagogue praying, praising God and dancing with the Torah, leaving little time to eat a large meal!)

This explains the language used in the Tanchuma where the King (God) asks his servants to prepare a small meal, not so that he can "enjoy the feast," but so that He "can have pleasure from you."

The extent of our closeness to God on Shmini Atzeret is hinted in the Torah reading of the day. We conclude with the final portion of V'Zot HaBracha and commence again at Bereishit. (Simchat Torah is celebrated on the same day as Shmini Atzeret in the Land of Israel.) The Torah ends with the letter *lamed* and begins with a *bet*, spelling the word *Leiv*, meaning heart, indicating that Simchat Torah is a time of rejoicing, '*Simchat HaLeiv*' (gladness of the heart) and closeness between God and Israel.

The Bnei Yissaschar (13:3) citing the Zohar (Mishpatim 2:114a) describes the degree of

our closeness with God. The verse in Song of Songs 8:6 says, "Place me like a seal on your heart." The closeness of the Jewish people with God is like the closeness of a seal on a paper. Even though the paper and the seal may go in different directions once the paper has been stamped, an impression has been made on the paper that can never be removed. This, explains the Zohar, is the essence of Shmini Atzeret. As we complete the Torah, and seal the reading (the word 'chotmin', meaning complete as well as seal) with a final *lamed* and new *bet* (*Leiv*) we are sealing God and His Torah in our hearts.

Getting Closer

By further analyzing the word *Leiv*, we will see that besides sealing God in our heart, on Shmini Atzeret God also seals us with His holiness:

Each letter of the Aleph-Bet is essentially a word in itself that can be broken down into its composite letters. When we spell out the word *LaMeD* (the first letter of *Leiv*) we have the 'revealed' letter *lamed* and the 'hidden' letters *mem* and *dalet*. The word *Bet* (the second letter of *Leiv*) is comprised of the 'revealed' letter *bet* and the 'hidden' letters *yud* and *tav*.

The two 'revealed' letters (*lamed* and *bet*) spell the word *Leiv*, heart, while the 'hidden' letters (*mem*, *dalet*, *yud*, *tav*) together possess the numerical value of 454, the same *gematria* as the word *Chotam*, meaning seal or stamp.

As we read the final portion of the Torah and re-commence at Bereishit, God is stamping our hearts, as it were, with his Godliness. Once we have been stamped, the impression is eternal, hinted at by the 'hidden' letters (*mem*, *dalet*, *yud*, *tav*) which spell the word *Tamid*, meaning 'everlasting'. Shmini Atzeret, therefore, is a day of joy as we celebrate the unique closeness between God and Israel by opening our hearts to receive the eternal Divine imprint.

House of Prayer

What we are required to do to receive this seal from God and to ensure that it is maintained?

The Sfat Emet proposes that the Sukkah has the status of a Beit Knesset (house of prayer), while the home has the status of a Beit Midrash (study hall). He verifies this idea in the following way. Both Jews and Gentiles are obligated in prayer, as it says in Isaiah 56:7: "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.: Since the Sukkah is compared to a house of prayer, then we can understand why, on Sukkot, we offer sacrifices on behalf of ourselves as well as the 70 nations of the world.

However, since the home has the status of a study hall, and that Torah study is unique to the people of Israel (Talmud - Sanhedrin 59a), then it makes sense that we offer up only one bull on this day.

The Sfat Emet continues by explaining that the transition of leaving the Sukkah and entering the home on Shmini Atzeret indicates that we are leaving the holiness of the synagogue and entering the spiritual dimension of the study hall, which is even higher than that of the synagogue. The Sfat Emet likens this transition to the verse in Psalms 84:8 which says, 'May they go from strength to strength,' to which the Talmud (Brachot 64a) says refers to entering the study hall after leaving the synagogue each morning. Just as we move from a place of great holiness (the synagogue) to an area of even greater holiness (the study hall), so too we move from the Sukkah into the home, on Shmini Atzeret.

The Sfat Emet also quotes the famous verse (Proverbs 6:23), 'Mitzva is a candle and Torah is light', and explains that the mitzvot involved in the festival of Sukkot are the candle, allowing one to receive the ultimate light of Torah on Shmini Atzeret.

Seven Weeks

Additionally, the seven days that lead up to Shmini Atzeret can be compared to the seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot. Just as we cried out to God in prayer at Pesach time, and therefore merited to see the light of Torah which we received at Mount Sinai seven weeks later, so we receive the 'candle' by fulfilling the mitzvot of Sukkot (which also has the essence of prayer) and merit to see the light of Torah at the end, on Shmini Atzeret.

In order to reach the great light, we must first acquire the candle. Just as we need Pesach to get to Shavuot, so we need Sukkot to reach Shmini Atzeret. [As Shmini Atzeret connects with Shavuot because they share the same essence of Torah, this could explain why they are both referred to as "Atzeret" (Numbers 29:35 and Mishnah Chagiga 2:4.)]

Shmini Atzeret and Shavuot are the only holidays that do not have a special mitzvah associated with the Yom Tov, but are "holidays" in the sense that we stop doing any creative activity. (Kedushat Levi)

With the awareness that by leaving the Sukkah and entering the home, we are ascending in holiness, and, with the understanding that by performing the mitzvot of Sukkot we merit to receive the Torah on Shmini Atzeret, we must recognize that God gave us Shmini Atzeret out of great kindness to His People (Rabbi Uri of Strolisk). Without Shmini Atzeret, we would find it extremely difficult to return to our homes after tasting the great holiness of the Sukkah for seven days. Once God provides us with a holiday to celebrate specifically in our homes, we can leave our Sukkah with less pain in our hearts.

Again however, the pain is diminished only if we are moving into a home that is a place of Torah. Only in this way can we move *'meChayil el Chayil'*.

Shmini Atzeret offers a unique opportunity to attach ourselves to God and enjoy the special relationship. If we make our homes places of study, adorned with Torah books, and we are dedicated to the study of Torah, if we open our homes to host Torah classes (Avot 1:4), and create an environment which is conducive to learning, then the "candle," the mitzvot of Sukkot, will lead us to receive the beaming light of Torah on Shmini Atzeret, ensuring a special connection with God which will stay stamped on our hearts for eternity.