

2. *Sukkot*, Judaism and Universalism

By Rabbi Dr. David Horwitz

Parshat Chayei Sarah begins with Avraham's request to acquire a burial site among the Hittites for his recently deceased wife Sarah. The language he uses in describing himself is *ger ve-toshav*.

1.

And Abraham rose up from before his dead, and spoke unto the children of Heth, saying: 'I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.'

Genesis 23: 3-4

וַיָּקָם, אַבְרָהָם, מֵעַל, פְּנֵי מֵתוֹ; וַיְדַבֵּר
אֶל-בְּנֵי-חֵת, לֵאמֹר. גֵּר-וְתוֹשָׁב אָנֹכִי,
עִמָּכֶם; תְּנוּ לִי אַחְזַת-קֶבֶר עִמָּכֶם,
וְאֶקְבְּרָה מֵתִי מִלְפָּנַי.

בראשית כג:ג-ד

What does this phrase mean? Why are the two terms separated by a *vav*? Are the two terms *ger* and *toshav* synonymous? A strict *peshuto shel mikra* reading can yield the conclusion that the two terms are indeed synonymous, and that *ger ve-toshav* conveyed the exact same meaning as *ger toshav*. Indeed, a verse in *Parshat Bechukotai* uses both *ger toshav* and *ger ve-toshav* interchangeably.

2.

And if a stranger who is a settler with thee be waxen rich, and thy brother be waxen poor beside him, and sell himself unto the stranger who is a settler with thee, or to the offshoot of a stranger's family,

Leviticus 25:47

וְכִי תִשִּׁיג, יָד גֵר וְתוֹשֵׁב עִמָּךְ, וּמִן
אָחִיךָ, עִמּוֹ; וְנִמְכַר, לְגֵר תוֹשֵׁב עִמָּךְ,
אוּ לְעֶקֶר, מִשְׁפַּחַת גֵר.

וּקְרָא כֹה:מִזֶּה

According to this explanation, the *vav* in *ger ve-toshav* does not serve to distinguish between the two terms. Thus the proper English translation of *ger ve-toshav* is “resident alien,” *not* alien *and* resident.¹

Rashi, however, following *Bereshit Rabbah*, interprets *ger* and *toshav* as two distinct terms. According to Rashi, when Abraham declared, “I am an alien and a resident among you,” he was either stating that he *was* an alien *ger* from another land who had *subsequently* settled as a *toshav* among the Hittites, or he was saying that he would agree to buy the land as an alien *ger*, but if forced to, he would take the land by virtue of his rights as a resident *toshav*.²

The distinction between the alien *ger* and the resident *toshav* has been used by various Jewish thinkers throughout the ages. For example, in the Medieval period, the Provençal thinker R. Levi Avraham ben Chaim (c. 1245–c. 1315), in his poem *batei ha-nefesh ve-ha-lehashim*, uses these two terms in the context of expressing the notion that man’s pure soul is encased and trapped in a physical, material body, but it longs to escape and ascend up high, from where it had come. “*Ve-sham nehsav ke-ger zar, lo ke-toshav.*” “And there [in a man’s body] it is considered a foreign *ger*, not a native *toshav*...”³

Maran Ha-Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, z”l, also interpreted the opposition between *ger* and *toshav* in his homiletic explanation of the encounter between Avraham and the Hittites. Rabbi Abraham Besdin summarized the Rav’s ideas on this score as follows:⁴

3.

“We study the narrative of the patriarchal period as though these Jews were lifted out of the ordinary concerns which affected their non-Jewish neighbors. In fact there is no *purely* covenantal historical experience. The reason is obvious. Abraham lived among various people of divergent faiths. When he negotiated with the sons of Heth (of the Hittites) for a burial plot for his wife Sarah, he defined his status: “I am a stranger [immigrant] *and* a resident among you” (Gen 23:4). He was basically declaring that the sectarian faith he was propounding did not preclude his commitment to further the welfare of the general society. Indeed, the *Midrash* teaches: “Great are the righteous of the world for occupying themselves with the habitation of the world.”

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The categories that the Rav drew are instructive in framing an appropriate understanding of the universalistic and particularistic aspects of *Chag Ha-Sukkot*. On the one hand, in *Sefer Vayikra*, the laws of *Sukkot* are presented with the same particular focus on *klal yisrael* as the laws concerning the other holidays.

4.

And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: Speak unto the children of Israel, saying: On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the LORD. On the first day shall be a holy convocation; ye shall do no manner of servile work. Seven days ye shall bring an offering made by fire unto the LORD; on the eighth day shall be a holy convocation unto you; and ye shall bring an offering made by fire unto the LORD; it is a day of solemn assembly; ye shall do no manner of servile work.... And ye shall take you on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees, and boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook, and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year; it is a statute for ever in your generations; ye shall keep it in the seventh month. Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are home-born in Israel shall dwell in booths; that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Leviticus 23: 33-36, 40-43

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר. דַּבֵּר
אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, לֵאמֹר: בַּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר
יוֹם, לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי הַזֶּה, חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת
שִׁבְעַת יָמִים, לַיהוָה. בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן,
מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ; כָּל-מְלֶאכֶת עֲבֹדָה, לֹא
תַעֲשׂוּ. שִׁבְעַת יָמִים, תִּקְרְיבוּ אֶשָׁה
לַיהוָה; בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ
יְהִי לָכֶם וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם אֶשָׁה לַיהוָה,
עֲצֵרֶת הוּא--כָּל-מְלֶאכֶת עֲבֹדָה, לֹא
תַעֲשׂוּ... וְלִקְחֶתֶם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן,
פְּרִי עֵץ הָדָר כַּפַּת תְּמָרִים, וְעֵנָף עֵץ-
עֵבֶת, וְעֵרְבֵי-נַחַל; וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם, לִפְנֵי
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם--שִׁבְעַת יָמִים. וְחִגְתֶּם
אֹתוֹ חַג לַיהוָה, שִׁבְעַת יָמִים
בַּשָּׁנָה: חֲקַת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם, בַּחֹדֶשׁ
הַשְּׁבִיעִי תַחֲגוּ אֹתוֹ. בַּסֻּכּוֹת תֵּשְׁבוּ,
שִׁבְעַת יָמִים; כָּל-הָאֲזָרַח, בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל,
יֵשְׁבוּ, בַּסֻּכּוֹת. לְמַעַן, יָדְעוּ דֹרֹתֵיכֶם,
כִּי בַסֻּכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל,
בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: אֲנִי,
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

ויקרא כג: לג-לו, מ-מג

Now, it goes without saying that the specific laws of *Sukkot: sukkah, lulav, etrog*, etc., are *mitzvot* that fortify the uniqueness of the Jewish people as the nation forever bound by God and His commandments. Yet, at the end of the prophetic book Zechariah, we find an astounding set of verses. These verses come after the prophet's depiction of the plague at the end days that shall befall the people that war against Jerusalem:

5.

And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations that came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso of the families of the earth goeth not up unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, upon them there shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, they shall have no overflow; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the nations that go not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations that go not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.⁵

Zechariah 14: 16-19

וְהָיָה, כָּל-הַנּוֹתֵר מִכָּל-הַגּוֹיִם, הַבָּאִים,
עַל-יְרוּשָׁלַם; וְעָלוּ מִדֵּי שָׁנָה בְּשָׁנָה,
לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לְמֶלֶךְ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת, וְלַחֹג,
אֶת-חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת. וְהָיָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יַעֲלֶה
מֵאֵת מִשְׁפְּחוֹת הָאָרֶץ, אֶל-יְרוּשָׁלַם,
לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת, לְמֶלֶךְ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת--וְלֹא
עָלִיהֶם, יִהְיֶה הַגֶּשֶׁם. וְאִם-מִשְׁפַּחַת
מִצְרַיִם לֹא-תַעֲלֶה וְלֹא בָּאָה, וְלֹא
עָלִיהֶם; תִּהְיֶה הַמַּגֶּפֶה, אֲשֶׁר יִגַּף יְהוָה
אֶת-הַגּוֹיִם, אֲשֶׁר לֹא יַעֲלוּ, לַחֹג אֶת-
חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת. זֹאת תִּהְיֶה, חֲטָאת
מִצְרַיִם; וְחֲטָאת, כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם, אֲשֶׁר לֹא
יַעֲלוּ, לַחֹג אֶת-חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת.

זכריה יד: טז-יט

In other words, Zechariah declares that at the End of Days *all* the nations of the world will come to Jerusalem and observe the festival of *Sukkot*. Moreover, those non-Jews who do not observe this festival will be punished!

Why was *Sukkot*, among all the holidays, chosen to be the universal holiday, the one on which (at least in the future), non-Jews will join with Jews in the service of God? Wouldn't *Rosh Hashanah* have been a more obvious and appropriate choice?

Rashi (commentary on Zecharia 14:16) connects this notion with a famous *Aggada* in *Masechet Avoda Zara* (3a-b):

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6.

The nations will then [at the End of Days] plead. 'Offer us the Torah anew and we shall obey it.' But the Holy One, blessed be He, will say to them, 'You foolish ones among peoples, he who took trouble [to prepare] on the eve of the Sabbath can eat on the Sabbath, but he who has not troubled on the eve of the Sabbath, what shall he eat on the Sabbath? Nevertheless, I have an easy command which is called *Sukkah*; go and carry it out... Straightaway will every one of them betake himself and go and make a booth on the top of his roof; but the Holy One, blessed be He, will cause the sun to blaze forth over them as at the Summer Solstice. and every one of them will trample down his booth and go away.

Avoda Zara 3a-b

אמרו לפניו רבש"ע תנה לנו מראש
ונעשנה אמר להן הקב"ה שוטים
שבעולם מי שטרח בערב שבת יאכל
בשבת מי שלא טרח בערב שבת
מהיכן יאכל בשבת אלא על פי כן
מצוה קלה יש לי וסוכה שמה לכו
ועשו אותה... מיד כל אחד [ואחד]
נוטל והולך ועושה סוכה בראש גגו
והקדוש ברוך הוא מקדיר עליהם
חמה בתקופת תמוז וכל אחד ואחד
מבעט בסוכתו ויוצא

עבודה זרה ג.

Yet the *Gemara* there only writes that God will give the Gentiles a one-time test, whereas the verses in Zechariah state that "all those nations...shall make a pilgrimage year by year."⁶

In his commentary to Zechariah 14:17, Rashi draws the connection between *Sukkot* and water. The reason God will punish the non-Jews for not making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem on *Sukkot* is, he writes, due to the fact that the commandments that pertain to *Sukkot* deal with (requests for) rain; both the four species and the libations of water. Those who reject the commandments of *Sukkot* are consequently punished with the withholding of water. Perhaps this explains the primacy of *Sukkot* over *Rosh Hashanna*. The human need for water lies at the basis of survival. Before the non-Jews can turn to the elevated moral duties of *Rosh Hashanna*, they are first obligated to pray for the water that their very lives depend upon.

Could Rashi's connections between *Sukkot* and water serve as a justification for the

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reason why non-Jews also will eventually observe *Sukkot*? One must be cautious and note that Rashi only attempts an explanation as to why non-Jews will be *punished* in the future for *not* observing *Sukkot*. His comment need not be construed as the reason *why* non-Jews would have to observe the holiday in the first place.

Radak (R. David Kimhi, in his comment on Zechariah 14:16) explains that as the great power of God will be manifest through the wars of the Messianic period, in every year a day will be set aside to commemorate the wondrous acts of God. According to this view, however, there is nothing special about *Chag Ha-Sukkot per se*.

Ha-Rav Shlomo Goren z"l, in his book *Torat Ha-Mo'adim*, after discussing Rashi and Radak's views, presented his own approach.⁷ He suggested that the future observance of *Hag Ha-Sukkot* by non-Jews is connected with a well-known Talmudic tradition that establishes the following link: the seventy bulls that are brought to the Temple, slaughtered and sacrificed during the seven days of *Sukkot* (Numbers 28: 12-34) correspond to the seventy nations of the world.

The *Gemara* states the following:

7.

R. Elazar stated: To what do the seventy bulls (that are offered during the seven days of *Sukkot*) correspond? To the seventy nations (of the world). To what does the single bull (of the eighth day of *Shemini Atzeret*) correspond? To the unique nation (of Israel)

Sukkah 55b

אמר רבי [אלעזר] הני שבעים פרים
כנגד מי - כנגד שבעים אומות. פר
יחידי למה - כנגד אומה יחידה.

סוכה נה:

Another source adds the following note:⁸

8.

On the Eighth Day You Shall Have A Solemn Assembly (Num. 29:35): This bears on what Scripture says: *In return for my love they are my adversaries: but I am all prayer* (Psalms 109:4). You find that on the Tabernacles festival Israel offers to Him seventy bulls as atonement for the seventy nations. Israel says: 'Sovereign of the Worlds!' Behold, we offer for them seventy bulls and they ought to love us, yet they hate us.' The Holy One, blessed be He, in consequence, said to them: 'Now therefore, offer a sacrifice on your own behalf: *On The Eighth Day You Shall Have A Solemn Assembly: You shall present a burnt-offering, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the L-rd: One bull, one ram* (Num. 29:36).

Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah 21:24

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Moreover, *Midrash Shohar Tov*, the *Midrash* on *Tehillim*, poignantly points out the lament of the Jews and adds the connection between the sacrifices on behalf of the non-Jewish world and the universal need for water:⁹

9.

In Return For My Love They Are My Adversaries (Psalms 109:4)...The people of Israel said to the nations of the earth: Because of us, the Holy One, blessed Be He, does all these things for you, and yet you hate us, as is said In Return For My Love They Are My Adversaries. At the festival of Tabernacles we offer up seventy bulls for the seventy nations and we pray that rain will come down for them. Yet In return for my love they are my adversaries: Still I am all prayer (Psalms 109:4).

Midrash Shohar Tov 109:4

Rav Goren suggested that it is biblical mandate to offer the seventy sacrifices on behalf of the nations of the world that formed the basis of the Zechariah vision concerning non-Jews and the *Chag* of *Sukkot* at the End of Days. That is, this concern with the nations of the world, the concern that was biblically expressed with the seventy bulls, will be expressed in the future period (and at least to a certain extent, required) as well. Some non-Jews might very well fail the test. Such is the position of the *Gemara* in *Avoda Zara*. If they pass the test, they realize that they also are ultimately dependent upon the One God, who beneficently bestows water to all human beings.

It is important to notice that according to this approach, the sacrifices in the Jewish Temple on behalf of the nations of the world continue whether or not the non-Jews join us. Moreover, they continue even though the non-Jewish world may be adversarial towards us. Such a situation is truly unfortunate, but the basic orientation of sacrifices on behalf of the nations of the world remains the same.

One can easily subsume the universalistic aspect of the sacrifices on *Sukkot* with the "*toshav*" aspect of the Jews' stance towards the rest of humanity as explained by the Rav. By the same token, the particularistic aspect of the *korbanot* of *Shemini Atzeret*, which represents the unique relationship of the Jewish people with God, fits with the "*ger*" aspect of Jewish existence in the world. Although we fully participate in the endeavors of mankind, we also have concerns of our own, as members of the unique covenantal community of Jews, bound to a *brit* with God.

Concern with sacrifices for the nations, for all that it is a universalistic concern, does not mark the end boundary of Jewish involvement with the non-Jewish world. As will be seen from this concluding quote from R. Besdin's summary of the Rav's notion of the universal and the covenantal, Jews are also enjoined to involve themselves in relieving the physical suffering and depredations of non-Jews and to better the world at large:¹⁰

10.

The modern Jew is entangled in the activities of the Gentile society in numerous ways— economically, politically, culturally, and on some levels, socially. We share in the universal experience. The problems of humanity, war and peace, political stability or anarchy, and pollution transcend the boundaries of ethnic groups...Jewish concerns are not exclusively parochial. It is our duty as human beings to contribute our energies and creativity to alleviate the pressing needs and anguish of mankind and to contribute to its welfare.

¹ For examples of this interpretation, see *Sefer Bereshit, Da'at Migra*, Vol. II (*Mosad Ha-Rav Kook* Press, Jerusalem, 2000), Gen. 23:4, p. 139 (Hebrew); *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia., New York and Jerusalem, 1989), pp. 157-58.

² Rashi to Genesis 23:4. Rashi (ad loc.) writes that his second interpretation is *midrash aggadah*.

³ J. Davidson, The First Chapter of the Book '*Batte hannefes we-hallehasim' es we-hallehasim*' by Lewi ben Abraham ben Hayyim," *Studies of the Research Institute for Hebrew Poetry in Jerusalem*, Vol. V (Schocken Jewish Publishing Company, Berlin and Jerusalem, 1939) (Hebrew), p.30.

⁴ Abraham R. Besdin, *Man of Faith in the Modern World: Reflections of the Rav, Volume Two* (Ktav Publishing House, Hoboken New Jersey, 1989), Chapter VIII ("The Universal and the covenantal"), pp. 74-75. The italics are mine. The Midrash the Rav cited can be found in *Midrash (Ha-)Hefetz to tGenesis 26:18*, the verse that describes the wells that the patriarch Isaac dug.

⁵ According to many commentators, since Egypt is watered by the overflow of the Nile River and does not need rain, the nature of its punishment must perforce differ than that of other nations and does not consist in the suspension of rain water. See Rashi, *Massekhet Sotah* 13a, s.v. *kedei*. Rashi to Zechariah 14:18 interprets the punishment as follows: the Nile River will not overflow, for the Nile serves as the analogous "rain source" of Egypt.

⁶ For this point, see R. Yitzhak Sorotzkin, *Rinat Yitzhak: Zechariah* (Hebrew) (Wickliffe Ohio, 1998), p. 379.

⁷ Shlomo Goren, *Torat Ha-Moadim*, (Avraham Zioni, Tel Aviv 1964).

⁸ *The Midrash Rabbah*, Vol. III: Numbers, translated into English by Judah J Slotki (The Soncino Press, London, Jerusalem and New York, 1977) p. 851. I have modified the translation slightly.

⁹ *The Midrash on Psalms*, Vol. II, translated from the Hebrew and Aramaic by William G. Braude (Yale University Press, New Haven 1959), pp. 203-04.

¹⁰ *Man of Faith in the Modern World*, p. 75