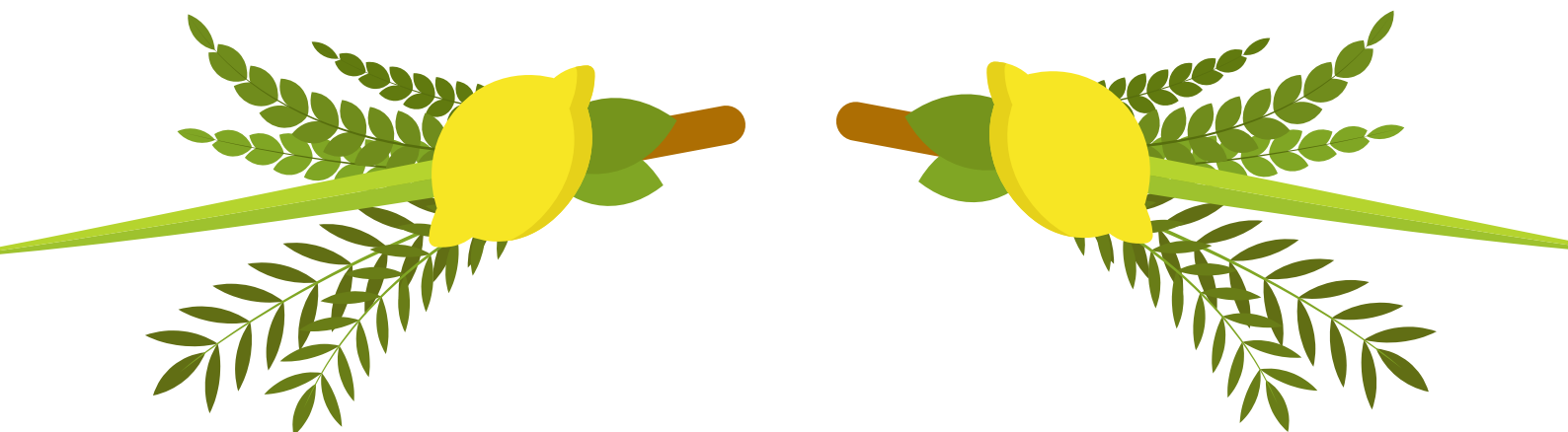




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The Shadow of Faith



Mike Feuer

Rabbi Mike Feuer teaches *Striving for the Divine*, *Rav Kook*, and *Jewish History* at Pardes.

There are two critical elements that define the roof of our sukkah: It must provide more shade than light, and we must see the stars through its branches.

This interplay between light and darkness, and the lesson that it offers, is why the Zohar calls the sukkah, *tzilah d'mheimnuta*, "the shade of *emunah*." *Emunah* is a difficult word to translate, and its meaning is an essential message of the holiday.

The origin of the term is found with Avraham when he looks up at the heavens and sees a barren future. In his pain he cries out to God, who replies, "Look toward heaven and count the stars...so shall your offspring be." It is an impossible promise – ninety-year-old parents do not have children – even according to Avraham's reading of the stars. Nonetheless, the Torah tells us that Avraham "believed in the Lord" (Genesis 15:5–6), and thus became *rosh hama'aminim*, first of the believers (*Shir haShirim Rabbah* 4).

This was no simple recognition of divine power, nor was Avraham abdicating his intellect. Rather, as Rebbe Nachman teaches, "Emunah starts only when the intellect is not able to understand, and then one needs *emunah*." By accepting God's promise, Avraham stepped beyond the sadness of a world bounded by what he knew and into the hopefulness of what might be. This act of *emunah* became the source of the laughter that gave Yitzhak his name, and is the birthright of his descendants to this day.

Avraham may have been the first of the believers, but Moshe was the foundation of the faithful.

We find the first mention of the word *emunah* in reference to Moshe's hands as he holds them up in battle against Amalek, the biblical embodiment of doubt: "Whenever Moshe held up his hand, Israel prevailed; but whenever he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed." Despite Moshe's weariness, the Torah tells us that "his hands were *emunah* until the sun set" (Exodus 17:12). The Hizkuni explains that *emunah* here refers to that which stands fast and does not weaken, and translates the verse as "Moshe's hands remained steadfast." Only days after the exodus, the people had brought the punishment of war with Amalek by asking, "Is God among us or not?" (Exodus 17:7). Now Moshe's hands taught them a critical lesson: *Emunah* means that no matter what, we are with God.

So what can the *emunah* of Moshe and Avraham teach us about our divine service on Sukkot? The shade of the sukkah calls us to respond faithfully to the mystery of life. On Sukkot we leave the safety of our built environment and enter the uncertainty that lies beyond the walls we construct. *Emunah* tells us that rather than fearing the unknown, or shrinking the world to our understanding, we can take shelter in the divine promise of what might be. It also teaches us that this is no passive acceptance. We are not called to a blind faith, but rather to a steadfast commitment to manifesting the Godly potential of life which lies beyond our understanding. If we look upward with a faithful hope, the stars shining through the branches recall the promise hidden in the incomprehensible, and evoke a belief that our steadfast labor can bring it to light.



Rabbi Eliezer's Sukkot



Thoughts on Alternative Halakhic Models and Their Implications

Leah Rosenthal

Leah Rosenthal has been a master Talmud teacher at Pardes for over twenty years and a pioneer of women's Talmud study in Jerusalem high schools.

One of the intriguing characteristics of the talmudic text is its insistence on exploring minority opinions, including those rejected as normative practice. This talmudic ethos has great impact on the intellectual and cultural world of the *beit midrash*. We are, through this model, offered momentary glimpses into alternative worlds of halakhic practice. Through them, we are able to see with greater clarity the choices made in the past by the mainstream halakhic world. We can perceive with greater insight not only that which has been gained by past halakhic decisions, but also what has been lost.

A striking example of this is the talmudic discussion of Rabbi Eliezer's halakhic positions regarding the *mitzvah* of sukkah. The second chapter of tractate Sukkah presents a concentration of legal disputes between Rabbi Eliezer and the Sages on various aspects of performing the commandment of dwelling in the sukkah during the festival of Sukkot.

I would like to focus on one of these disputes here.

Rabbi Eliezer said: Just as one may not fulfill their obligation on the first day of the festival with their fellow's *lulav*, as it is written, "And you shall take **to you** on the first day the fruit of a beautiful tree, a date-palm frond," i.e., from your own, one may likewise not fulfill their obligation with their fellow's sukkah, as it is written, "The festival of Sukkot you shall keep **to you** for seven days" (Deuteronomy 16:13), i.e., in a sukkah of your own.

The Sages, however, say: Although one may not fulfill their obligation on the first day of the festival with their fellow's *lulav*, one may nevertheless fulfill

their obligation with their fellow's sukkah, as it is written, "All that are homeborn in Israel shall dwell in **sukkot**" (written *sukkat*, in the singular), which teaches that all Israel are able to sit in one sukkah (Sukkah 27b).

This passage shows Rabbi Eliezer arguing for similarity between the two central *mitzvot* of Sukkot. Based on a unanimously accepted idea that full ownership is a requirement for the fulfillment of the mitzvah of *lulav*, Rabbi Eliezer argues that Scripture implies that the same holds for the fulfillment of the commandment of sukkah. One can perform the mitzvah of sukkah only while sitting in his or her own sukkah.

Please take a moment to imagine what the holiday of Sukkot would be like if this indeed were the halakhic imperative. Each individual (or individual family) sits in their own sukkah. No hosting, no visiting, no sukkah-hopping! How significantly different from our experience of this holiday! Combined with an additional requirement of Rabbi Eliezer, presented in another passage in the Talmud, requiring that one remain in the same sukkah for the entire seven days of the festival, this imperative would appear to result in a retreat-like experience of focusing inward, toward the self. This could result in a potentially powerful spiritual experience, one that seems to follow almost naturally the experiences of Yom Kippur undergone just a few days before.

Rabbi Eliezer's opinion serves to highlight the way the Sages have chosen to frame the commandment of sukkah as a community experience: "All Israel are able to sit in one sukkah." Different, individual sukkot are all manifestations of the one



sukkah that is our shared dwelling during this time. These two contrasting opinions suggest different interpretations of the mitzvah and of the nature of this festival. One focuses on the individual, the other on the communal.

It seems to me that this dispute is echoed in a famous dispute between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva mentioned elsewhere in tractate Sukkah:

“For I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths.” (Lev 23:43)

These were clouds of glory, says Rabbi Eliezer. Rabbi Akiva says: They made for themselves real booths (11b).

This dispute over the nature of “the booths” – the sukkot of the wilderness – that we commemorate by dwelling in our sukkah yearly, suggests connections to the dispute about the nature of the mitzvah and the holiday. The different emphasis placed on the actual or the spiritual, the communal or the individual, the shared or the separate, is reflected in both sources. I invite you to consider and to discuss the various connections between the two disputes while sitting in your sukkot this year.

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Zman Simhateinu



The Time of Our Rejoicing

Meir Schweiger

Rabbi Meir Schweiger is the most veteran member of the Pardes faculty and the Director of the Pardes Executive Learning Seminar. He also holds the position of Mashgiach Ruchani, Director of Religious Life, reflecting his impact on the personal and spiritual growth of students.

Of all the Jewish festivals, Sukkot is the only one which is referred to, in our prayer services, as *zman simhateinu*, the time of our rejoicing. Ostensibly, this is based on verses from the Torah.

In the book of Leviticus (23:40), the Torah says: “And you shall take on the first day: the fruit of a beautiful tree, a date-palm frond, a branch of a thick tree, and willows of the brook; and you shall **rejoice** before the Lord, your God, for seven days.” Later, in the book of Deuteronomy (16: 13–15), the Torah says: “The festival of Sukkot you shall observe for seven days as you gather from your threshing floor and vat. And you shall **rejoice** on your festival [Sukkot] – you, and your son, and your daughter, and your servant, and your maid, and the Levite, and the stranger, and the orphan, and the widow, who are in your gates. Seven days you shall celebrate in the place which God has chosen, in accordance with the blessing of God which is in all of your produce and all of the work of your hand, and you shall be only **joyful**.” *Three times* the Torah says that we are to rejoice on Sukkot. But what, in fact, makes Sukkot so unique?

There is a general rabbinic commandment of rejoicing on the festivals – *simhat Yom Tov*. As Maimonides (Laws of the Festivals 6:17–18) writes:

[17] The seven days of Pesach and the eight days of Sukkot, together with the other festivals, are prohibited in fasting and eulogizing. One is obligated to be **joyous** and good-hearted.... [18] How so? One gives nuts and sweets to little ones, and buys clothing and fine jewelry, according to his means, for the women. The men eat meat and drink wine, for true joy is in eating meat and drinking wine. But when one eats and drinks, one

is obligated to feed the stranger, the orphan, and the widow together with all the other unfortunate poor. However, one who shuts the doors of his courtyard and, together with the members of his household, eats and drinks but does not feed the poor – this is not called a **mitzvah act of rejoicing** but rather the **rejoicing of his stomach....**

Maimonides, based on the Talmud (Pesachim 109a), connects rejoicing on the festivals with eating special foods – meat and wine. But he emphasizes another component as well: the social responsibility of sharing one’s meals with the poor and needy. Rejoicing is predicated on a feeling of satisfaction and blessing; but it is not enough for I alone to feel satisfied. I need to be *good-hearted*, to empower others with a feeling of blessing as well. The mitzvah of rejoicing can be fulfilled only in a context of communal satisfaction.

Why, then, does the Torah single out Sukkot as the “time of our rejoicing”? The answer can be found in those biblical verses quoted earlier.

First, Sukkot comes at the end of the harvest season, at a time when one can fully appreciate the material abundance and blessing in their life. Hence the Torah emphasizes: Be happy with all that you have; be good-hearted and share all that you have with those around you who are needy. Enable them to feel equally blessed and be happy as well. This may also explain why we sit in the sukkah: we go outside and open our doors; we reenact the experience of the Jewish people in the desert, when all were equally dependent upon God – but also equally blessed.

Second, rejoicing is associated with



the taking of the Four Species. According to the Mishnah (Sukkah 3:1, 9, 15), there is a mitzvah not only of *taking* the four species, but of *waving* them during the recitation of the Hallel. The source for this practice seems to be verses from Chronicles I, 16:33–35:

Then will the trees of the forest sing before the Lord because He came to judge the earth: "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever." And say: "Deliver us, the God of our salvation."

According to a midrash, the waving of the Four Species on Sukkot is a form of prayer, a victorious song of praise and thanksgiving to God for having acquitted us on Yom Kippur. During the period of the High Holy Days, there is a sense of trepidation and fear: "Who will live, who will die...who will have serenity, who will be in turmoil"; in the aftermath of Yom Kippur, when we have been inscribed in the Book of Life, there is a tremendous feeling of relief and joy. To what do we attribute this? "For His mercy endures forever." We rejoice in God's love and mercy, in God's goodness. Although we continue to request God's salvation regarding the rainy season which is

about to begin, we do so with elation and confidence.

In fact, the most intense joy of the festival was actually experienced during the special celebrations of the *simhat beit hashoeva*, associated with the water libation, which were held in the Temple each night of Sukkot. In the words of the Mishnah (Sukkah 5:1): "Anyone who did not see the **joy** at the *beit hashoeva* never experienced **rejoicing** in his lifetime."

Other midrashic interpretations of the Four Species understand them as symbolizing different body parts – heart, spine or mind, eyes, and lips. Waving them expresses how we come before God, in song, as a *whole person*; all our limbs sing God's praises. Another midrash sees them as symbolizing different types of Jews. By waving all of them together, we acknowledge the unity of the Jewish people and how each one is needed in service of God and in actualizing our collective destiny.

To conclude, it seems that in order to rejoice, one needs to feel connected – to God, to nature, to oneself, and to the people around us. More than any other holiday, Sukkot has the ability and the mandate to bring out that sense of harmony and well-being!

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Close Encounters



Shani Gross

Rabba Shani Gross is the Director of North American programs at Pardes, a Wexner Graduate Fellow/Davidson Scholar (class 29), and a proud graduate of Yeshivat Maharat.

The holiday of Sukkot is often understood as a time to focus on our relationship with God (*bein adam laMakom*). We are commanded to leave behind the structure and comfort of our homes and settle in our sukkot, to remember how God took our ancestors out of Egypt and cared for their every need as they wandered through the desert. However, the Mishnah in tractate Sukkah raises another perspective on this *hag* [holiday] and points out the opportunity Sukkot gives us to deepen our relationship with our fellow human beings (*bein adam lehaveiro*).

The Mishnah questions whether a person can fulfill the halakhic obligation of residing in the sukkah if they sleep beneath a bed. The Sages reason that since the bed serves as a tent, it is as if it is an independent dwelling within the sukkah, and therefore sleeping beneath it does not fulfill one's obligation. Curiously, the Mishnah's proof text for this conclusion is a story about Rabban Gamliel and his servant Tavi:

אמר רבי שמעון, מעשה בטבי עבדו של רבן גמליאל
שהיה ישן תחת המטה, ואמר להן רבן גמליאל
לזקנים, ראיתם טבי עבדי, שהוא תלמיד חכם ויודע
שעבדים פטורין מן הסכה, לפיכך ישן הוא תחת
המטה.

Rabbi Shimon said: It happened that Tavi, the servant of Rabban Gamaliel, used to sleep under the bed [within the sukkah]. And Rabban Gamaliel said to the elders, "Have you seen Tavi my servant, who is a wise scholar, and knows that servants are exempt from [the law of] a sukkah; therefore, he sleeps beneath the bed" (Sukkah 2:1).

What's so striking about this story is its imagery: Rabban Gamliel, the powerful and wealthy *Nasi* [leader] of the Jewish people and head of the *Sanhedrin* [rabbinic court], sharing close quarters with his non-Jewish servant, Tavi. Perhaps even more remarkable is the role reversal that seems to take place beneath the *s'chach* (the leafy roof of the sukkah). The famed scholar becomes the student, and the Canaanite servant becomes the *talmid hakham* [wise scholar]. Similarly, the one who is not obligated to sleep in the sukkah is the one who ultimately teaches those who are obligated, how to do so correctly. In this way, the transient nature of the sukkah enables both Rabban Gamliel and Tavi to step outside the fixed, permanent structures of their societal roles and encounter each other in a new way.

On Pesach we say: כָּל דֹּכְפִין יִיתִי וַיִּכַּל, כָּל דֹּצְרִיךָ יִיתִי וַיִּפְסַח – Anyone who is famished come and eat, anyone who is in need come and partake of the *Pesach* sacrifice. In making this declaration, we invite those in need to benefit from our Seder table. But on Sukkot we do the reverse: We go out. Like Rabban Gamliel and Tavi, on Sukkot we are tasked with stepping outside our typical dwellings, to leave behind the superficial lines that might otherwise divide us. For this reason, Sukkot is *hag simhateinu*, the holiday of joy, because we are encouraged to shift our focus from what separates us, and instead celebrate the wonder of community and togetherness. Hopefully, by taking this collective step outward, we can truly see the Torah each individual has to offer.





Tales of the Stolen Lulav

Daniel Reifman



Rabbi Dr. Daniel Reifman teaches Talmud at the Pardes Kollel. He is a fellow at the Bar-Ilan Institute for Advanced Torah Studies and has published and lectured widely on Jewish medical ethics.

When do religious ends justify the means used to achieve them? This question is especially pertinent on Sukkot, as the very first law that the Mishnah articulates regarding the Four Species is that one does not fulfill his or her obligation by taking a stolen lulav (or any of the other species). The Talmud explains that using a stolen lulav is invalid because it constitutes a *mitzvah haba'ah be'aveirah* – a religious act facilitated by a sin. It would seem that Jewish law brooks no compromise: When the path to a mitzvah is tainted by sin, the mitzvah is contaminated as well.

As it turns out, this conclusion is a bit premature. The principle of *mitzvah haba'ah be'aveirah* is curiously absent in a number of talmudic discussions where it would seem to be relevant; it appears that the question whether a sin invalidates the mitzvah that it facilitates depends on the specifics of the situation. Theft, for instance, seems to be considered more contaminating than other sins (e.g., consuming non-kosher food to fulfill a mitzvah, such as eating matzah at the Seder), and even the effect of theft can be reduced when it is separated from the mitzvah by some other process (e.g., using stolen wood to build a sukkah). Some commentators suggest that it is specifically the devotional nature of mitzvot such as lulav that demands greater sensitivity to the purity of the process. But regardless of why *mitzvah haba'ah be'aveirah* is not invoked more broadly, we should ask what deeper message it conveys in the cases where it does apply.

Fortunately, the rabbis indulge our curiosity, offering not one but two parables to explain the status of a stolen lulav. The Talmud Yerushalmi explains: “To what is one who takes a stolen lulav comparable? To one who honored the governor with the gift of a platter and it turned out to belong to the governor. People said of him: ‘Woe to him whose defense attorney became his prosecutor!’”

In this parable, the lulav is an offering to a stern authority figure; a stolen lulav is a personal affront, undermining the very purpose of the offering. This perspective is reflected in a passage that the Talmud cites from the book of Malachi (1:8), where the prophet rebukes his countrymen for bringing inferior animals – “the stolen, the lame, and the sick” – as offerings to the Temple: “Offer it to your governor; will he accept you? Will he show you favor?” The moral of this parable seems to be that religion must be treated with no less honesty or earnestness than the other commitments in our lives. One who values their relationship with God will ensure that the process by which they fulfill their religious obligations is as pure as the final result.

The Talmud Bavli, too, explains the law of a stolen lulav with a parable about a sovereign, but with a marked difference in his relationship to his subjects:

What is the meaning of the verse: “For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery with a burnt offering” (Isaiah 61:8)? This may be compared to a human king who was passing by a customs house and said to his servants, “Pay the tax to the tax collectors.” They said to him, “But all the tax is yours!” He said to them, “All travelers will learn from me not to evade taxes.” So, too, the Holy One, blessed be He, said, “For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery with a burnt offering”: Let My children learn from Me to distance themselves from robbery.

The Bavli’s parable, too, emphasizes that ultimately everything belongs to God (“All the tax is yours!”). But whereas the Yerushalmi depicts a hierarchical



relationship between the subject and the governor, in the Bavli the king positions himself as an equal to his subjects, going beyond the letter of the law in order to serve as a personal example. According to this view, the offense of a stolen lulav is not against God, but rather against victims of theft in general.

The message is not solely religious, but also moral: God may be above harm, but He cares about the offenses perpetrated against His creations.

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Hoshana Rabba



The Prayer of the Simple Willow

Alex Israel

Rabbi Alex Israel teaches Tanakh and is the Director of the Pardes Community Education Program and Summer Program. Alex recently published his second book, "II Kings: In a Whirlwind" (Maggid, 2019).

Hoshana Rabba is the seventh day of Sukkot. On this day, it is customary to circle the synagogue with the four species in hand, praying, "Hosha-na: Save us!" But then, we proceed to cast the four species aside and take a bunch of *aravot* (willow branches), uttering special prayers for rain, prosperity, and salvation. As such, Hoshana Rabba focuses our attention on the *aravah* in particular.

In the mind of the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 30:12), each of the four species represents a different type of Jew.

The *etrog* (citron) has taste and has smell. So too, Israel has individuals who possess both Torah and good deeds....

The *lulav* (date-palm frond) has fruit with taste but no smell. So too, Israel has individuals who possess Torah but not good deeds....

The *hadas* (myrtle) has smell but no taste. So too, Israel has people with good deeds but no Torah....

The *aravah* (willow) has neither smell nor taste. So too, Israel has people with neither Torah nor good deeds....

And what does the Holy One, blessed be He, do to them? The Holy One, blessed be He, said: "Bind them all together, and these will atone for those."

Each day of Sukkot, we bind the four species together, representing all Israel, together – the learned and the pious, and those unlearned and non-observant. We bind the entire collective together and we all raise one another.

But on Hoshana Rabba, we cast away the four species and take a bundle of willow branches. This day, the culmination of Sukkot, is the day in which the simple Jew – not learned nor significantly observant – takes his or her place in the center.

A further allusion presented by the Midrash mentions each of the four species as one of the tools by which we connect with God: The spine (*lulav*), the heart (*etrog*), the eyes (*myrtle*), and the lips (*willow*). The long leaves of the willow look like and are a representation of the lips.

Hoshana Rabba is the day of our lips, as we lengthen our prayers and pray fervently for life, for rain.

The *Sefat Emet* (5645) says that although a simple Jew may have neither learning nor virtuous deeds, everyone can use their lips; everyone has the power of prayer. In fact, it is precisely and specifically the prayer of the unlearned, unvirtuous, simple Jew which shines on this day. Because we are all bound together, the heartfelt prayer, the humanity and holiness, and the straightforwardness which is the essence of the simple, will raise, will save, the learned and the pious.

Of all the four species, says the Midrash, the willow is the most needy of water. It is the first to wilt. And in kind, the expression of the willow, the simple individual, understands that we need "water" – God's ongoing protection, God's sustaining power – to give us life.

Each Hoshana Rabba, I go with my family at dawn to pray at the Kotel, praying and celebrating with an entire mosaic of every type of Jew.


This day, we all place ourselves as the



willow branch – the aravah – a willow that is renamed and termed “Hosha-na Save! Please!” expressing our most simple, primal, cry for life, for a good year. These prayers express neither our virtue nor our learning, but rather our simplicity and our unity.


In this way, Sukkot reaches its climax; a mix of faith, prayer, unity of Israel, fragility, simplicity, and humility.

Hag Sameah!



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Shemini Atzeret



On Rain and on Living in an Uncertain World

David Bernstein

Dr. David I. Bernstein is the Dean of Pardes. He teaches Modern Jewish History and Contemporary Israel.

There is a well-known saying that only two things are certain in our world: death and taxes. Everything else is uncertain, and subject to change – sometimes sudden, unexpected change, often causing great surprise or terrible disappointment. How can we live and thrive in such a world?

While there are many Jewish sources that seem to provide promises and certainty, one can also find sources that recognize that it doesn't always seem to work out that way – at least not immediately. One example is the problem of “why bad things happen to good people,” which the rabbis addressed as well.

Interestingly enough, some of our sources seem to also indicate that uncertainty might not be such a bad thing. There might even be advantages to a world where there is much uncertainty!

Take as an example the choice of the Land of Israel as the home of the Jewish people. Deuteronomy 11:10–12 describes how easy life was in Egypt, with the annual, assured overflowing of the Nile, and the ease with which one could irrigate one's fields. The same could be said for the Tigris-Euphrates river valleys. These rivers formed the basis of the ancient Near Eastern civilizations.

Yet God chose to place the Jewish people in a land with few water resources, where we will have to depend on the uncertainty of rain, and where drought is a recurring phenomenon (even in contemporary times). In Egypt, one looks down to the river to water one's crops; in the Land of Israel, we must look up to heaven as the source of water and sustenance, which forces us to confront our own limitations as human beings.

For me, this is reflected in my own prayers for rain on Shemini Atzeret. When I lived in America, I must

admit that this was not the most meaningful of prayers for me. In fact, I prefer sunny weather in the mid-70s! Why should I pray for bad weather? Rain is inconvenient. It means getting wet, shlepping an umbrella (inevitably to be forgotten somewhere), and greater difficulty finding a taxi in Manhattan.

It was only when I experienced Shemini Atzeret in Israel for the first time that I looked around me and saw people praying with intense *kavannah*. They were literally praying for rain. In Israel, one understands that our water supply is limited. Even with the largest desalination plants in the world today, as well as the highest percentage of reused water, everyone is concerned about the level of the Kinneret (Sea of Galilee). Drought causes increased prices of food and water. Plentiful rain helps keep our underground aquifers safe. Even when rain continues unabated for a few days in a row, many Israelis will feel guilty complaining about the weather; after all, we know how desperately we need our water resources, and how we need to be grateful for the rain.

It is the very uncertainty of our water supply that makes us appreciative, as we know it cannot be taken for granted. Gratitude in turn helps control our egos from growing too large, adding an element of healthy humility to our lives.

According to positive psychology, appreciating what we have is a foundation for human happiness. Those who practice gratitude experience more joy and pleasure in life, and are less likely to be visited by negative and toxic emotions.

Uncertainty, then, is not only fundamental to our existence. It even has some benefits.