

What Comes Next?

“What comes next?

You’ve been freed

Do you know how hard it is to lead?

You’re on your own

Awesome. Wow

Do you have a clue what happens now?”¹

These words, sung by King George in the musical *Hamilton*, demonstrate precisely what we are feeling at this time. Just like a nation which won an improbable battle for freedom is on its own, so too have we won the merit of entering another year in the Book of Life. Yet we can ask the same question: “What comes next?” Our tradition teaches Sukkot! The first act one is commanded to do after Yom Kippur concludes is to begin building his/her Sukkah. At the same time, there was a level of debauchery associated with Sukkot, so much so that after the holiday a series of 3 fasts BeHaB, standing for “Bet” (Monday), “Hey” (Thursday) and “Bet” (Monday) was established, as people had

¹ King George in *Hamilton* “What Comes Next?” Book and Lyrics by Lin Manuel-Miranda.

overstepped their bounds and committed grievous sins during Sukkot. It appears that the freedom of the *tabula rasa*, the new beginning, was short-lived as people returned to their sinful ways.

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev in his book *Kedushat Levi* wrote on this topic based off the verse from this morning's reading: וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בְּיוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן “*You shall take for yourself on the first day.*”² *Kedushat Levi* quoted *Midrash Tanhuma* on this verse as follows: “Is this day truly the first day? Is it not actually (that Sukkot falls on) the fifteenth of the month? Rather it is the first day for the calculation of sins.”³ How can that be: shouldn't Rosh Hashanah, the first day of the Jewish New Year, be the first day for the calculation of sins?

Kedushat Levi continues: “This *Midrash* actually does not make sense...still there is something to this lesson. Between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, each and every person certainly has his or her eyes open to examine all their ways to return to the Holy One, each one according to their insight and their spiritual development, fearing G-d

² Leviticus 23:40

³ Midrash Tanhuma Emor 22

and the glory of His exaltedness when He rises to judge the earth...but after Yom Kippur, when they turn to the mitzvot of *sukkah* and *lulav* and the four species and *tzedakah* according to the blessings of the Holy One, with wholeheartedness and love, seeking to serve G-d, worshipping with joy and a full heart, they engage in what is called ‘*teshuvah* from love’ (תשובה מאהבה).⁴

The lesson taught by Kedushat Levi is that our work on self-improvement and repentance should **not** stop after Yom Kippur but rather **must** continue throughout the year. As in the saying I put on Facebook, “While it is important to act properly between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, it is perhaps more important to act properly between Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah.”⁵

As we continue to enjoy our beautiful Sukkot holiday, let us ponder how we will continue to strive to work on self-improvement, taking the lessons of the High Holy Days forward with us. May we follow the *Kedushat Levi’s* maxim, recognizing that there are

⁴ Kedushat Levi VaYelekh. Translation by Rabbi Jonathan Slater.

⁵ Attributed to Nehama Leibowitz (though I could not find the citation)

consequences for our actions and that we are judged for our behavior at every moment, not only on the High Holy Days. Let us also understand, however, that we cannot be too serious: we need to take moments of joy like Sukkot after serious introspection and contemplative prayer, like Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. May we strive to achieve balance, harmony and unification in our lives, and let us greet whatever comes next with mindfulness, patience and calmness.