

A Midrash on Achari Mot and HaMoed Sukkot

This weeks reading is for Chol HaMoed Sukkot (*Shemot / Exodus 33:12-34:26*) and is taken from the end of Parashat Ki Tisa (*Shemot / Exodus 33:12-34:26*). Here Moshe asked the Lord God to forgive the sins of the Children of Israel and Moshe asks the Lord to reveal Himself and His glory. The Lord commands Moshe to make two stone tablets like the previous ones and He will write on them the words that were on the previous set of Tablets. Moshe also demonstrates for us this week the importance of knowing God according to His ways in his statement ‘Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people.’ (NASB) Moshe asks “... Now if I have found favor in your eyes let me know your ways so that I might find favor in your eyes.” Having found favor in God’s eyes, Moshe desires to know God in a more intimate way. This text shows us the order of obedience; we have found favor in God’s eyes because He loves us, now we obey the Lord so that we can walk in His favor, His love, and His blessing. In addition to these things, this week is the harvest festival known as Sukkot. Sukkot (סוכות, *Tabernacles*) is an 8 day festival and one of three major festivals the men of Israel were to present themselves before the Lord in Jerusalem. This year Sukkot is observed on the 18th to the 25nd of September (2013). At this time each family constructs a sukkah, a small hut in which meals are eaten during the week. In this festival we are reminded not only that Israel dwelled in huts during their forty year journey in the wilderness after having left Egypt but also that God desires to dwell in our midst.

שדוקה יבתח / The Holy Scriptures	
ספר דברים פרק לג	Devarim / Deuteronomy 33:7-9
<p>ז וזאת ליהודה ויאמר שמע יהודה קול יהודה ואל-עמו תביאנו ידיו רב לו ועזר מצריו תהנה: ח וילוי אמר תמיד ואוריה לאיש חסידה אשר נסיתו במסה תריבהו על-מי מריבה: ט האמר לאביו ולאמו לא ראיתיו ואת-אחיו לא הכיר ואת-בניו לא ידע פי שמו אמרתה ובריתך ינצרו:</p>	<p>33:7 And this regarding Judah; so he said, ‘Hear, O Lord, the voice of Judah, And bring him to his people. With his hands he contended for them, And may You be a help against his adversaries.’ 33:8 Of Levi he said, ‘Let Your Thummim and Your Urim belong to Your godly man, Whom You proved at Massah, With whom You contended at the waters of Meribah; 33:9 Who said of his father and his mother, ‘I did not consider them’; And he did not acknowledge his brothers, Nor did he regard his own sons, For they observed Your word, And kept Your covenant. (NASB)</p>

Following Sukkot, it is customary to finishing reading the book of Deuteronomy and then turn back to the book of Genesis and begin another year of reading the Torah. Reading through the portion of Scriptures for Sukkot (Tabernacles) and from Parashat Achari Mot (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 33:1-34:12*), I noticed something interesting in the Hebrew text from Parashat Achari Mot. Looking at *Devarim / Deuteronomy 33:8* ח וילוי אמר תמיד ואוריה לאיש חסידה אשר נסיתו במסה תריבהו על-מי מריבה: (NASB), it is interesting, the English translation states “Let Your Thummim and Your Urim belong to Your godly man” and these being tested at Massah and Meribah. Question: “was it the Thummim and Urim that were being tested or was it the godly men?” Massah is one of the locations which the Torah identifies as having been travelled through by the Israelites, during the Exodus, although the list of visited locations in Numbers doesn’t mention it, however, in the Book of Exodus, Massah is mentioned at the same time as Meribah, in a context which suggests that Massah is the same location as Meribah. (*Shemot / Exodus 17, Bamidbar / Numbers 20 and 27, and Devarim / Deuteronomy 32*). It is interesting to note that in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 32:51* Moshe explains the significance of this location *32:51 because you broke faith with Me in the midst of the sons of Israel at the waters of Meribah-kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin, because you did not treat Me as holy in the midst of the sons of Israel. (NASB)* The historical context of Massah and Meribah involves the people who complained for not having water and Moshe for not sanctifying (breaking faith) the name of the Lord in the midst of the sons of Israel. Back to *Devarim / Deuteronomy 33:8*, what is it about the Thummim and Urim that were being tested? The English translation leaves a lot of questions. Are “Thummim” and “Urim” a correct translation of the Hebrew text in light of the historical background on Massah and Meribah and the context of the Hebrew sentence (*33:8*)? The first thing to observe is that Thummim and Urim are not the literal translations of the Hebrew words תמיד ואוריה. In addition to this, while recently studying *Tehillim / Psalms 26:1* we read David saying *26:1 Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity (innocence), And I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. (NASB)* Analyzing David’s use of the word “thumei” the word תמי means “integrity” or “innocence” and Hebrew lexicons (BDB) say that the word אור means “light” or “flame.” Therefore, when Moshe was speaking of Levi (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 33:8*) was he referring to the “innocence and light” that belonged to the godly men, and these were tested at the waters of Massah and Meribah? In light of the reading for this week for Sukkot, David’s words from *Tehillim / Psalms 26*, and Parashat Achari Mot, Moshe said in *Shemot / Exodus 33:13* “...Now if I have found favor in your eyes let me know your ways so that I might find favor in your eyes.” What are the ways of God but to walk in innocence and truth (His light, Word, etc), the very thing that was tested at the waters of Massah and Meribah! The complaints of the people show they were not walking in innocence and truth. While in the wilderness, the Lord tested Israel and we learn that they were called to walk in innocence and truth. Today we are also called to walk in innocence and truth before the Lord God Almighty. In this festive time we are reminded of the wilderness journey, of the Lord who dwells in our midst, and of walking in innocence and truth. The truth is the Lord sent His Messiah Yeshua to make atonement for our sins. In light of this truth, during this week long festival of remembrance, let’s walk in innocence and truth in the Messiah. Hallelujah!