

# Don't Forget About Us

For the last 7 weeks, we have been reciting Psalm 27 – ‘For David, the Lord is my light and my salvation...’ - as part of the High Holiday season liturgy. The Psalm is a song filled with piety and longing for connection to the Divine. But it is particularly appropriate for the High holidays because of the references to the holidays we might infer from the verses themselves. ‘The Lord is my light’ suggests the holidays Rosh Hashanah, the day of the creation of the world. From the first words in the Torah of Genesis, we see God’s first step of active creation was announced with the words: “Let there be light.”

The suggestion for Yom Kippur comes from the next word, “The Lord is my...salvation.” The themes of personal redemption that come from the process of repentance, which culminate on the Day of Atonement, seem an appropriate description for this day. ‘The essence of the day of Yom Kippur atones,’ suggests the rabbis and with atonement comes our salvation. The Mishna claims that there was no more celebratory day of the year than Yom Kippur. To which, the Talmud expands upon with the comment – that was a day of forgiveness and atonement – it’s clear why that day should be a day of intense celebration.

Sukkot is next on the list of holidays. And the reference is less subtle. The Psalm states plainly: “God will hide me in His Sukkah on the day of evil.” The sukkah, our impermanent structure, is a tangible pedagogic device that announces Divine intervention as a vital and essential part of our lives. We have a thin thatch roof above us and wobbly walls around us and God’s protection and love within us. (See Vayikrah Rabba)

But the Holiday season ends with Shmini Atzeret, the 8th day of the celebration, after 7 days of Sukkot. Rabbinic literature describes the holiday as *Regel Bifnei Atzmoh* – a stand-alone Holiday, not an addendum to Sukkot. Then where is the reference to Shmini Atzeret in Psalm 27?

We might suggest a number of possibilities. Perhaps verse 11, ‘God, teach me Your ways.’ That can be a reference to guidance through a life of Torah. And Shmini Atzeret is buttressed by the festivity of Simchat Torah, which we will celebrate on the 9th day of this Holiday period. But the festival of Simchat Torah is – though exquisitely beautiful – a relatively modern rabbinic innovation. It would seem too much a stretch to claim verse 11 a reference to Shmini Atzeret.

A Midrash posits an interesting notion: Every one of the warmer months was slated to carry a holiday; Nisan – Passover; Iyar – Pesach Sheni, the Makeup Passover; Sivan – Shavuot. God planned for a major holiday in Tammuz but those plans were thwarted because the Hebrews forsook their relationship with God and built the Golden Calf instead. So Tammuz, Av and Elul were cancelled as months for holidays. Tishrei came along and hosted the holidays that were supposed to have been in the prior months; namely, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot. God said, Tishrei is making up for lost months of the summer, but takes not Holidays for herself – Tishrei’s holiday is Shmini Atzeret. (Pesikta d’Rav Kahana, 25)

Shmini Atzeret is the one day that God wants to give to Tishrei. Perhaps that drama is referenced in the phrase: “One thing I ask of God – that I sit in the house of God all the days of my life.” (verse 4) The last holiday of Tishrei requests a permanent arrangement where God and humanity can be in intimate closeness. And as we come to the end of the holiday season and we begin to feel the closeness to the divine fading, we finish this season praying for a continued closeness; ‘God, we will try not to forget You; please, don’t forget about us.’

Chag Sameach and Shabbat Shalom Umervorach,

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