**SALT | Yom Kippur - Sukkot 5784 – 2023**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

 Toward the beginning of our *Selichot* service, we proclaim, “*Lekha Hashem ha-tzedaka, ve-lanu boshet ha-panim*” – “Righteousness, O Lord, is yours, whereas we are shamefaced.” The source of this declaration is a verse in Sefer Daniel (9:7), where it appears as part of Daniel’s impassioned prayer to God, confessing that the calamities which befell the Jewish People occurred as a result of the people’s wrongdoing.

 Rav Avraham Abba Kleinerman (in an article in [*Ha-maor –* Tishrei/Cheshvan](https://beinenu.com/sites/default/files/alonim/288_63_84.pdf), 5784, pp. 11-12) suggested explaining the significance of the word “*tzedaka*” in this verse based on a comment made by the Gemara (Pesachim 31b) about the implication of this term. The Gemara cites the command in Sefer Devarim (24:13) requiring a lender to return each night the borrower’s garment which had been given as collateral for the loan. The Torah says that a lender who does this – returning the garment each night, so that the needy borrower can have a warm garment to sleep in – would be credited with an act of “*tzedaka*” (“charity,” or “righteousness”). The Gemara infers from this verse that “*ba’al chov koneh mashkon*” – the creditor is, in a sense, considered the owner of the object taken as collateral. This ownership status has repercussions vis-à-vis legal responsibility for the object: the lender is responsible to repay the borrower for the loss of, or damage caused to, the object, even if this loss or damage occurred due to circumstances beyond his control. As he is considered the “owner” while the object is in his possession, he assumes responsibility for it, just as all people bear responsibility for their property. The Gemara reaches this conclusion on the basis of the fact that the Torah regards returning the collateral as an act of “*tzedaka*.” If the creditor were not considered the owner, the Gemara reasons, then he would not be considered to perform an act of “*tzedaka*” by returning the collateral to the pauper for the night. The use of the word “*tzedaka*” in this context proves that the creditor is viewed as giving away something that he technically owns.

 Rav Kleinerman suggests applying the Gemara’s discussion to the verse, “*Lekha Hashem ha-****tzedaka****, ve-lanu boshet ha-panim*.” In the *modim* section of our daily *Shemona Esrei* prayer, we express our gratitude to God for many things, including “*al nishmoteinu ha-pekudot lakh*” – “our souls which are entrusted to You.” This has been explained as a reference to the nighttime, when we experience a form of “death” in the sense of losing our consciousness, as our souls depart and are “entrusted” to the Almighty. Each morning, He lovingly restores our souls, allowing us to awaken to yet another day. In light of the Gemara’s comments regarding the lender’s return of the collateral to the borrower, the phrase “*Lekha Hashem ha-tzedaka*” might be understood as emphasizing God’s ownership over our souls. They belong to Him, and He graciously gives them to us each morning, like a creditor compassionately returning the collateral to the impoverished debtor. And for this reason, “*lanu boshet ha-panim*” – we are shamefaced as we stand before Him to request forgiveness. He gives us our soul anew each morning, trusting us that we will use it properly, to achieve and to contribute to the world, but, too often, we have misused the precious gift of life. We have wasted our time on vanity, and have acted in ways that we should not have. When we reflect on God’s “*tzedaka*,” the gift He graciously gives us each day, we feel ashamed, realizing the extent to which we have squandered countless opportunities over the course of our lives. The period of *Yamim Noraim* calls upon us to recommit ourselves to utilize the precious gift of life for the purpose for which we have received it, and to make the very most of each and every day we are privileged to spend in this world.

Sunday

 In the *ne’ila* prayer which we recite toward the end of Yom Kippur, we declare that God gave us the occasion of Yom Kippur as an opportunity to receive forgiveness for our sins, and “*lema’an nechdal mei-oshek yadeinu*” – “so that we restrain our hands from theft.” Many writers have addressed the question of why we point specifically to the sin of theft as we describe the purpose of this solemn day when we repent and beseech God for forgiveness.

 [Rav Yigal Faso](https://www.yholon.co.il/%D7%9C%D7%9E%D7%A2%D7%9F-%D7%A0%D7%97%D7%93%D7%9C-%D7%9E%D7%A2%D7%95%D7%A9%D7%A7-%D7%99%D7%93%D7%99%D7%A0%D7%95/) suggests answering this question by noting that the word “*oshek*” refers to a very specific type of theft, namely, withholding something which we owe somebody. The Torah in Parashat Ki-Teitzei (Devarim 24:14) commands, “*Lo* ***ta’ashok*** *sekhar ani ve-evyon*” – that one may not withhold wages owed to a laborer. “*Oshek*,” then, denotes keeping for ourselves that which we are meant to give our fellow. It is a more subtle form of theft in that we do not forcibly or deviously seize somebody else’s property, but rather refuse to hand over to our fellow that which we are dutybound to give.

 One of the goals of the Yom Kippur experience, Rav Faso explains, is for us to stop keeping for ourselves that which we owe the world. God has given each and every one of us special talents and capabilities which are meant to be shared. We are expected to use our skills and resources to advance mankind, to uplift the people around us, to assist our fellow, and to make a unique contribution that no one else can make. We are thus all guilty, to one extent or another, of “*oshek*,” of failing to give the world what we owe it. We have kept at least some of our gifts and talents for ourselves, utilizing them for our own selfish interests, rather than making an effort to have an impact and contribute. The occasion of Yom Kippur is a time to take stock of our outstanding “debts” to mankind, to consider what we have to share that we have yet to share, and to resolve to cease our “*oshek*,” and give all we can to the world.

Monday

 The Mishna in Masekhet Sukka (25a) establishes the well-known rule that “*okhlin ve-shotin arai chutz la-sukka*” – small amounts of food and beverages may be consumed outside the *sukka* during Sukkot. The *sukka* obligation requires eating meals inside the *sukka*, just as meals are normally eaten in one’s home, but quick snacks and drinks are allowed outside the *sukka*. The very next Mishna (26b), however, tells of stories of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai and Rabban Gamliel who made a point of bringing even small amounts of food into the *sukka* to eat. The Gemara explains that these stories are told to teach that one who wishes may be stringent in this regard, and insist on eating and drinking in the *sukka* even small amounts which do not require a *sukka*, and this does not constitute *yuhara* – a display of arrogance.

 Based on the Gemara’s comments, the Rambam writes in *Hilkhot Sukka* (6:6), “One who takes upon himself the stringency of not even drinking water outside the *sukka* is worthy of praise.” According to the Rambam, this practice is not only acceptable, but also admirable. The *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 639:2) brings the Rambam’s comments as *halakha*.

 In the story told in the Mishna about Rabban Gamliel, he was given two dates and “a bucket of water,” and he had them brought to the *sukka*. We might, at first glance, conclude that even for those who wish to observe this stringency, only a significant amount of water needs to be drunk in the *sukka*. As the story of Rabban Gamliel involves a “bucket,” and not just a cup, we seemingly have no basis for extending this stringency to include even very small amounts of water. However, the *Perisha* commentary to the *Tur* (O.C. 639) understands from the Rambam’s formulation of this stringency – “not even drinking water” – that those who wish to observe this stringency should not even drink a sip of water outside the *sukka*.

 Rav Yekutiel Lieberman (in an article in [*Ha-maor –* Tishrei/Cheshvan, 5784](https://beinenu.com/sites/default/files/alonim/288_63_84.pdf), pp. 46-47) addresses the question of whether this stringency would include sipping water if necessary to swallow a pill. Swallowing the pill itself, quite clearly, would not constitute a halakhic act of “eating” that would require a *sukka* (for the fulfillment of this stringency). If, however, one observing this stringency needs to sip water in order to swallow the pill, perhaps he would need to go into the *sukka*. As Rav Lieberman notes, many *poskim* (including Rav Shmuel Wosner, in *Sheivet Ha-levi* 10:83) maintain that one who sips water to swallow a pill recites a *berakha* over the water if he feels thirsty, such that the water not only facilitates his ingestion of the pill, but also quenches his thirst. It stands to reason, then, that with regard to the stringency to drink in the *sukka*, too, one who observes this stringency would need to take the pill in the *sukka* if he feels thirsty.

Rav Lieberman notes, however, that if other people are present in the *sukka*, and the patient requiring the medication feels embarrassed taking the pill in front of them, then this situation qualifies as “*mitzta’er*” – a case where the *sukka* causes one discomfort, thus exempting him from the *sukka* obligation. Therefore, even if the patient observes the stringency to eat and drink small amounts in the *sukka*, he may take the pill outside the *sukka* to avoid embarrassment.

Tuesday

 In introducing the *mitzva* to celebrate Sukkot, the Torah in Parashat Re’ei (Devarim 16:13-15) seems to unnecessarily repeat this command. First, it instructs, “You shall make for yourself a festival of *sukkot* for seven days, when you gather [the produce] from your granary and your wine press.” The Torah then states, “You shall celebrate to the Lord your God for seven days…”

 To explain this repetition, Rav Meir Simcha Ha’kohen of Dvinsk creatively suggests (in *Meshekh Chokhma*) that the Torah refers to two different situations. Ordinarily, Sukkot is celebrated “when you gather [the produce] from your granary and your wine press,” at the completion of the harvest, when the yield has been brought into the warehouses. However, once in seven years, there is no gathering of produce. During the *shemita* year, agricultural activity is forbidden, and thus farmers do not have fruits, vegetables or grain to harvest and gather. Therefore, the Torah repeats the command to celebrate Sukkot without mentioning the gathering of the harvest, as it refers in this second verse to the Sukkot celebration following the *shemita* year, when no produce is harvested.

 For this reason, the *Meshekh Chokhma* adds, this second verse concludes, “*ve-hayita akh samei’ach*” – “and you shall be only joyous.” The word “*akh*” (“only”) generally connotes a qualification of what is being said, the setting of a certain limit on the instructions being presented. The *Meshekh Chokhma* suggests that in this context, the Torah alludes to the fact that after the conclusion of the *shemita* year, the Sukkot celebration is limited, in that it does not mark the completion of the harvest season. Whereas generally Sukkot features both the joy of the harvest, and the joy of our close relationship with God, in a year following the *shemita* year we celebrate only the latter, as there is no harvest. And thus the Torah commands, “*ve-hayita* ***akh*** *samei’ach*,” indicating that only one of the two elements of the Sukkot celebration are observed.

 We might add that Sukkot is celebrated as part of two distinct groups of holidays. On the one hand, it is the third of the three *regalim* (pilgrimage festivals) which mark different stages of the agricultural cycle. Pesach celebrates not only the Exodus, but also the beginning of the harvest season, as the Torah commands harvesting the first of the new grain on the night of the 16th of Nissan (Vayikra 23:10-11). Shavuot marks the celebration of “*bikkurei ketzir chitim*” – the beginning of the wheat harvest (Shemot 34:22), and Sukkot, as mentioned, celebrates the completion of the process of storing the produce before the autumn rains. But additionally, Sukkot is part of the series of holidays observed during the month of Tishrei, which revolve around the theme of atonement and forgiveness. After attaining forgiveness on Yom Kippur, we joyously celebrate in our *sukkot*, as though residing together with God in a small, intimate space, having renewed our relationship with Him, which had been strained as a result of our misdeeds. In the year after *shemita*, the *Meshekh Chokhma* observes, only the second of these two components of the Sukkot celebration exist. Sukkot in such a year does not celebrate the harvest, and celebrates only the renewing of *Am Yisrael*’s close bond with God. Whereas normally Sukkot celebrates both the harvest and our repaired relationship with the Almighty, after *shemita* we are commanded, “*ve-hayita* ***akh*** *samei’ach*,” to celebrate only the restoration of our special bond with God following the intensive process of repentance undergone earlier during this month.

Wednesday

 The first Mishna in Masekhet Sukka establishes that a *sukka* extending twenty *amot* (approx. 30-40 feet) high or higher is invalid for the *mitzva* of *sukka*. The Gemara brings several different explanations for this *halakha*. One explanation, cited in the name of Rava, is that “the Torah said: All seven days, leave your permanent residence and dwell in a temporary residence.” A *sukka* that is twenty *amot* high, Rava asserts, cannot be considered a “temporary residence,” and, as such, it does not qualify as a valid *sukka*. Rava cites as the source of this rule, that a *sukka* must be a temporary residence, the Torah’s command in Parashat Emor (Vayikra 23:42), “*Ba-sukkot teishvu shiv’at yamim*” – “You shall reside in *sukkot* for seven days.”

 The Maharam Lublin draws our attention to the fact that Rava does not simply say that the *sukka* must be a temporary structure, but rather interprets the Biblical command of *sukka* as a requirement to “leave your permanent residence and dwell in a temporary residence.” The definition of the *mitzva* is not only the residence in the temporary dwelling of the *sukka*, but also the departure from one’s permanent home. The Maharam goes so far as to say that this understanding of the *mitzva* lies at the heart of Rava’s inference from the verse. He writes that we would have anticipated the Torah to have formulated the command of *sukka* in these terms – “Leave your home and enter a *sukka,*” as this is the essence of the obligation. The Torah instead commanded, “You shall reside in *sukkot* for seven days” in order to indicate to us that the *sukka* must be a temporary structure, one suitable for living for only one week.

 Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, in *Chashukei Chemed – Sukka* (pp.30-31), references the Maharam’s discussion in addressing the unusual situation of a home with a retractable roof. If a person has the option of removing his roof and covering the home with *sekhakh*, turning the entire home into a large, comfortable *sukka*, would it nevertheless be preferable to build a normal, small *sukka* outside the home? According to the Maharam’s understanding of Rava’s comment, Rav Zilberstein writes, it would seem preferable to build a small *sukka* outside the house, as the very definition of the *sukka* obligation is a requirement to “leave your permanent residence.” Rav Zilberstein emphasizes that one certainly fulfills this obligation by opening his roof and placing *sekhakh*, as he thereby transforms his home into a “temporary” dwelling which does not offer protection from the rain. Nevertheless, one might argue that, since the essence of the *sukka* obligation is leaving one’s home, there is a preference to building a separate structure, rather than simply converting one’s home into a *sukka*.

Thursday

 The Rama (626:3) addresses the situation of a *sukka* constructed under a retractable roof, meaning, with planks above the *sekhakh* that are attached to the walls on both sides by hinges. When rain falls, the Rama writes, one may close the roof in order to protect the *sukka* from the rain. The Rama writes that this is allowed even on Yom Tov or Shabbat, as closing and opening the roof do not constitute building and dismantling that would be forbidden on Shabbat and Yom Tov. However, the Rama adds, one must ensure that the roof is open while eating in the *sukka* (when it is not raining), because the *sukka* is invalid for the *mitzva* when the roof is closed. The *Mishna Berura*, citing the Vilna Gaon, explains that sitting underneath the closed roof is akin to sitting inside the house.

The *Machatzit Ha-shekel* (640:9) advances the surprising theory that if the planks covering the *sukka* are made from wood, then it would be preferable during rainfall to eat in the *sukka* under the roof than to eat inside one’s home. *Tosafot* (Sukka 2a) famously cite Rabbeinu Tam’s ruling that a *sukka* made with impenetrable *sekhakh*, that does not allow rain to enter the *sukka*, is invalid for the *mitzva*, as such a structure does not qualify as a “temporary” residence, as *Halakha* requires. This ruling is brought as *halakha* by the *Magen Avraham* (627:2). However, the *Hagahot Maimoniyot* (*Hilkhot Sukka* 5:20) relates a story about Rabbeinu Tam’s brother-in-law, Rabbi Shimon, who constructed a *sukka* with planks of wood in a manner that protected the *sukka* from the rain, and Rabbeinu Tam ruled that it was invalid. Rabbi Shimon, apparently, disagreed with Rabbenu Tam, and felt that impenetrable *sekhakh* does not disqualify a *sukka*. The only condition for allowing the use of planks, according to Rabbi Simcha, is that the wood planks must be narrower than four *tefachim* (handbreadths), as the Sages invalidated planks that are four *tefachim* are wider, which resemble the roofs of homes, a rabbinic enactment known as “*gezeirat tikra*” (see *Shulchan Arukh* O.C. 629:18; the *Shulchan Arukh* adds that it is customary not to use even thinner planks as *sekhakh*). Although Rabbi Shimon’s opinion is not accepted as *halakha*, the *Machatzit Ha-shekel* writes, it stands to reason that one who has this option, of protecting the *sukka* from rain with wooden planks narrower than four *tefachim*, should eat in the *sukka* under these planks, in order to fulfill the *mitzva* according to this view. Since such a *sukka* is functional even during rainfall, Rabbi Shimon’s opinion seemingly requires eating in this *sukka* even when it rains. Therefore, it would be proper to satisfy this opinion by eating under this roof when rain falls.

The *Machatzit Ha-shekel* adds that as the *sekhakh* must be placed on top of the *sukka* “*le-sheim tzel*” – for the purpose of providing shade, and not for other purposes (such as for privacy) – one must have in mind when closing the roof over the *sukka* to not only protect the *sukka* from the rain, but also to provide shade if the sun would return.

 This point is made also by Rav Yaakov Ettlinger, in his *Bikkurei Yaakov* (626:12), though he adds that this should be done even if the planks covering the *sukka* are four *tefachim* or wider. Torah law allows using as *sekhakh* wooden planks four *tefachim* or wider, and it was *Chazal* who enacted that they should not be used. As such, the *Magen Avraham* (629:22) writes that under extenuating circumstances, if one has no other option for *sekhakh*, wide planks may be used for the *mitzva*. The *Bikkurei Yaakov* reasons that rainfall, which prevents one from fulfilling the *mitzva* of *sukka*, constitutes a “*she’at ha-dachak*” (a situation of “extenuating circumstances”) that would certainly permit using planks to cover the *sukka* in order to facilitate the observance of the *mitzva* according to the view of Rabbi Shimon. Therefore, even if the retractable covering over the *sukka* consists of planks wider than four *tefachim*, it is would be preferable to eat in the *sukka* underneath this covering when rain falls.

Friday

 Yesterday, we noted that although *Halakha* follows the view that the *sekhakh* must not be impenetrable, and must rather allow rain to enter the *sukka*, nevertheless, one view among the *Rishonim* seems to disagree. Rabbeinu Tam’s brother-in-law, Rabbi Shimon (*Hagahot Maimoniyot*, *Hilkhot Sukka* 5:20), reportedly made such a *sukka*, indicating that he felt that impenetrable *sekhakh* does not disqualify a *sukka*. Accordingly, as we saw, a number of *poskim* – the *Machatzit Ha-shekel* (640:9) and *Bikkurei Yaakov* (626:12) – maintained that if one is able to protect his *sukka* from rain with a wooden covering, he should place the covering over the *sukka* during rainfall and eat in the *sukka*, in order to satisfy the view of Rabbi Shimon.

 Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, in *Chashukei Chemed – Sukkot* (pp. 32-37), discusses this topic at length, and advances a theory to explain why other *poskim* do not propose this solution when rain falls. He notes in particular the ruling of the *Mishna Berura* (631:6) that if one built a *sukka* with impenetrable *sekhakh*, then, after the fact, the *sukka* may be used, in light of the opinions among the *Rishonim* who permit the use of such a *sukka*. Yet, the *Mishna Berura* does not bring the solution proposed by the aforementioned *poskim* to facilitate the observance of the *mitzva* when rain falls. If, indeed, a *sukka* with impenetrable *sekhakh* is valid for use after the fact, then, seemingly, it should be obligatory, or at least preferable, to cover the *sukka* with wooden planks during rainfall in order to facilitate the fulfillment of the *mitzva* according to the minority view. Once the *Mishna Berura* allows a *sukka* with impenetrable *sekhakh* if this is what is available, why does he not require, or at least recommend, the solution of an impenetrable covering over the *sukka* when rain falls?

 Rav Zilberstein answers this question by noting the ruling of the *Shulchan Arukh Ha-Rav* (626:1) regarding a *sukka* that is built for multiple purposes. *Halakha* requires that the *sekhakh* must be placed “*le-sheim tzel*” – for the purpose of providing shade – as opposed to other purposes, such as for privacy. The *Shulchan Arukh* *Ha-Rav* states that if one placed the *sekhakh* over the *sukka* for shade but also for some other purpose, the *sukka* is invalid. In his view, *Halakha* requires placing the *sekhakh* solely for the purpose of shade, and not for any additional reason, such as to limit the penetration of rain, or because one plans to use the *sukka* as a residence or storage area even after Sukkot. According to the *Shulchan Arukh Ha-Rav*, then, a distinction must be drawn between using *sekhakh* which does not allow rain to enter the *sukka*, and placing a separate covering made for the expressed purpose of protecting the *sukka* from rain. Although Rabbi Shimon allows using *sekhakh* that is impenetrable, he agrees that the *mitzva* cannot be fulfilled if one covers the *sukka* when rain falls with wooden planks that protect the *sukka*, since this additional layer of *sekhakh* is placed for the purpose of blocking the rain. Even if one also has the intention when placing the covering that he wants to provide shade, clearly, his primary intent is to protect the *sukka* from rain, and thus the *sukka* would not be valid for use. Hence, although the *Mishna Berura* allows using a *sukka* made with impenetrable *sekhakh* if this is the only *sukka* available, he would not advise eating during rainfall in a *sukka* shielded by a special protective covering, as the aforementioned *poskim* recommend.

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 The Mishna in Masekhet Sukka (51a-b) describes the special *simchat beit ha-sho’eiva* celebration that was held in the area of the *Beit Ha-mikdash* on each night of Sukkot. We are told that the “*chassidim ve-anshei ma’aseh*” – the exceptionally righteous among the nation – would dance with torches. Netziv, in his *Meromei Sadeh* commentary, explains that this refers to dancing in a circle holding torches. The more common understanding, however, follows Rashi’s interpretation, that the Mishna refers to juggling; these righteous scholars would juggle several torches. Indeed, the Gemara later (53a) tells that during the *simchat beit ha-sho’eiva*, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel “would take eight fiery torches, throw one and catch one, without them touching one another.”

 Rav Aharon Sorasky, in the introduction to his biography of Rav Meir Shapiro (*Rabbi Meir Shapiro Ba-mishna, Ba-omer U-ve-ma’as*), reads this description as an analogy for the multiple achievements of accomplished sages. He writes that Rav Meir Shapiro illuminated the world in many different ways, without any particular endeavor “touching” any other, meaning, diminishing from the impact of any other undertaking. Rabban Shimon’s juggling of torches symbolizes the “juggling” of numerous different areas of achievement that disseminate “light” to one’s surroundings, depicting how outstanding people are able to accomplish and contribute in so many different ways.

 In a generally similar vein, Rav Natan Gestetner (*Le-horot Natan – Moadim*, vol. 3, p. 356) suggests that this description alludes to Rabban Gamliel’s excelling in all the various *middot* (qualities), and his working to develop each one separately. Piety requires “juggling” different – and often opposing – characteristics; for example, we are, on the one hand, to show flexibility and yield to the will of others, but, at the same time, we must be steadfast and resolute when it comes to our values and principles, resisting external pressure. The “*chassidim ve-anshei ma’aseh*” are those who succeed in this difficult “juggling act,” who know when and how to utilize each quality, ensuring that they never “touch one another,” building within themselves each characteristic without allowing one to compromise the other.

 Significantly, this juggling act was performed as part of the joyous *simchas beis ha-sho’eiva* celebration. It has been suggested that this aspect of the *simchas beis ha-sho’eiva* might indicate that “juggling” the different necessary personality traits, and our many different religious obligations, brings joy. The greatest joy in life is not avoiding responsibilities and commitments, but rather successfully balancing them. We experience true joy when we, like Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, put in the work and effort to master the skill of “juggling,” tending to our various obligations without “dropping” a single one. Indeed, this is a very difficult skill, and thus it was the “*chassidim ve-anshei ma’aseh*,” outstanding figures such as Rabban Shimon, who performed this act. We are to strive to reach this level, where we can “juggle” the full range of religious values and responsibilities, so that we live a complete, properly-balanced, integrated life of Torah commitment.

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**This devar Torah marks the final piece of the "Surf a Little Torah" series which I have been privileged to write for nearly 23 and a half years.  I cannot even begin to describe how much I have gained from this experience, digging through the endless treasures of Torah literature - with the indispensable help of the miracle of modern technology - and sharing my finds with readers throughout the world.**

**I would like to express my profound gratitude to the entire Yeshivat Har Etzion family - the generous supporters, faculty, staff, and VBM community - for making this experience possible.  I am appreciative to Rav Ezra Bick for agreeing, in the spring of 2000, to my unusual (to put it mildly) offer to take on this daily project.  (Until then, SALT was written by different authors based on a weekly rotation.)  I, along with everyone who enjoys the material on the VBM, are deeply indebted to the exceptionally devoted office staff - Debra Berkowitz and Andy Riffkin - for making this happen, day in and day out.  I both thank them and apologize to them for their having to handle last-minute submissions and corrections, which they always did graciously.**

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**This project, by definition, entails a great deal of pressure, which means that I unfortunately was often compelled to write hastily.  This occasionally resulted in mistakes, a lack of clarity, or a final product that was less thorough and informative than it should have been.  I apologize for all the times when the quality fell short of the standards that VBM students have rightfully come to expect.**

**I wish everyone a year full of joy and blessings, and that we may all continue our lifelong journey of Torah learning and growth as Jews and as human beings.**

**With much appreciation,**

**David**