



Our  
Ushpizin



## MOSHE

# Moshe Rabbeinu, Time-Traveler

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**W**hat will Moshe Rabbeinu think when he walks into your *sukkah* this Chol Hamoed?

Moshe, of course, is no stranger to time travel. While learning Torah with G-d on Mount Sinai, G-d catapulted Moshe forward in time to visit the Beit Midrash of Rabbi Akiva.

The Gemara (Menachot 29b) relates that while studying Torah on Mount Sinai, Moshe found G-d affixing crowns to the letters of the Torah.

When Moshe asked G-d about the purpose of these crowns, G-d explained “because there will be a man in the future named Rebbe Akiva who will extrapolate heaps and heaps of *halachot* (laws) from each crown.” Moshe turned around to find that G-d had taken him more than 1,000 years into the future, to Rabbi Akiva’s crowded Beit Midrash, where they were discussing this very issue.

As Moshe listened in from the back of the room, the Gemara describes that “he did not know what they were saying.” He was distressed until a student asked Rabbi Akiva where a particular *halachah* comes from. Rabbi Akiva answered, “that is a *Halachah LeMoshe MiSinai* (a law Moshe learned from Mount Sinai, but not written explicitly in the Torah).”

Hearing this, Moshe was comforted. Just as Moshe admitted to Hashem that he did not understand the analysis of the letters’ crowns, he did not understand how Rebbe Akiva’s approach to Torah study derived from the Torah he had studied at Mount Sinai. But upon hearing the phrase *Halachah LeMoshe MiSinai* he understood that the Torah tradition he had received from G-d

at Mount Sinai would continue to be passed down through all the generations of history, even if the discourse and style of study would change.

This story helps us answer our original question. How will Moshe react upon entering your 21st century *sukkah*? He might be wowed by the fairy lights and the modern bamboo mats, or take pride in the laminated school projects decorating the *sukkah*. But though your *sukkah* likely looks very different from the one that Moshe himself lived in in the desert, its fundamental halachic features would be the same. Many of these *halachot* of the *sukkah* fall in the category of *Halachah LeMoshe MiSinai*, just like the law taught in Rabbi Akiva’s Beit Midrash.

For example, we learn from Moshe the minimum number of walls and the smallest acceptable width and breadth of the *sukkah*. We understand the unique concept of *lavud*, that even if there are gaps in the wall, we consider the wall to be unbroken. Millennia later, the external trappings of our *sukkot* may be different, but Moshe would likely be comforted in knowing the tradition from Sinai continued in the structure of the *sukkah* itself.

Why do we say that Moshe received the Torah from Sinai (*miSinai*) when he received it from G-d on Sinai? Perhaps the phrase should read *Halachah LeMoshe MiHashem*. What did Moshe learn from Mount Sinai itself? The Rabbis explain that Mount Sinai was the smallest mountain, and was chosen to receive the Torah precisely because it did not think itself worthy of being selected. Sinai was the humblest and lowest of mountains and embodies the teaching: “just as water leaves a high

place and flows to a low place, so do words of Torah only remain with a humble person” (Megillah 7a). Moshe learned Torah on Mount Sinai, but he also learned Torah *from* Mount Sinai. Sinai taught Moshe the importance of humility in learning Torah, a lesson Moshe fully absorbed. The Torah calls Moshe, עָנִי מְאֹד מְכַל הָאָדָם, “more humble than any other person” (Bamidbar 12:3). He alone had the humility to accept every word of the Torah and pass it on faithfully.

The concept of *Halachah LeMoshe MiSinai* requires the humility to accept a law when there is no logical or exegetical reason for it. It is purely Hashem’s will, as transmitted through Moshe. Rabbi Akiva showed Moshe that he accepted not only the content of Moshe’s words but also the content of Moshe’s character.

When Moshe walks into our *sukkot*, what will he think of us? We hope that our *sukkot*, a demonstration of our humble fidelity to the *Halachot LeMoshe MiSinai*, will bring Moshe the very same comfort and joy he experienced in Rabbi Akiva’s Beit Midrash!

**Hannah and Yoni Abrams** are Mizrahi UK Fellows, and will be going to the UK on shlichut in 2023. They are both participants in Mizrahi’s Shalvehet leadership program. Yoni is studying for *semicha* at Yeshiva University in Israel, while Hannah is learning at Matan’s Advanced Halakhic Institute.