

This week's parashah, Haazinu, Chapter 32 of Deuteronomy, takes the form of a poem, the final song that Moshe sings to the people, full of anxiety, hope and exhortation.

It is also full of unconventional metaphors for God, including one of my favorites, which appear in verses 11-13.

Like an eagle who rouses its nestlings,  
Hovering over its young,  
So did [God] spread wings and take them,  
Bear them along on pinions;

יהוה alone did guide them,  
No alien god alongside.

[God] set them atop the highlands,  
To feast on the yield of the earth. . .

Notice the metaphor: an eagle hovering.

Rashi interprets the phrase “al gozalav y'rachef” (hovering over its young) to mean “it does not press heavily upon them, but hovers above them — touching them and yet not touching them.”

Rashi's poignant phrases, “touching and not touching,” describes a relationship of very delicate balance: love that can support without clinging, that can offer without grabbing. I imagine that any of us who have loved intensely – as a parent, as a lover, even as a friend – have struggled to learn how to offer that balance of closeness and distance that can enable a relationship, so to speak, to fly

But the image of a mother eagle stretching its wings over us also evokes the image that we sing about almost every week: spread over us wing of peace; in Hebrew, u'fros aleinu Sukkat shalom.

We read Ha'azinu the Shabbat before sukkot, and so I am struck by the similarity of concepts – the fluttery, hovery wings that do not quite touch us, the Sukkah, that fragile vulnerable almost shelter that does not quite protect us from the elements.

There is something that we can only experience when we feel sort of, but not entirely safe. And Sukkot, which is considered in the Talmud to “haChag” – THE Holiday, is considered to be the most joyous time precisely because this is when we revel in our vulnerability, embracing the miracle of being alive when it could so easily be otherwise. As Rabbi Alan Lew (z”L) wrote, “perhaps this special joy [of Sukkot] is precisely the joy of being stripped naked, the joy of being flush with life, the joy of having nothing between our skin and the wind and the starlight, nothing between us and the world.”<sup>1</sup>

Sukkot is the time that, like the metaphor of the hovering eagle, we let the awesomeness of the world hover over us, “touching not touching,” oneness with everything.

Rabbi Dr. Erin Leib Smokler points out that the verb “hovering” is the same verb that appears in the second verse of Genesis. And the earth was without form and void [tohu va'vohu]; and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the wind of God hovered ‘מְרַחֵף אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֵף upon the face of the waters.

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<sup>1</sup> *This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared*, p. 265

She writes, “At the end of Moshe's life and at the end of the Torah, we are called back into consciousness of this sacred reality that birthed us. Parshat Haazinu tells us that the force that holds up the world is also the force that holds us up, touching and not touching, fluttering just close enough for us to feel the presence of our Source but staying just far enough away to enable us to stand. Placed here at this auspicious moment at the end of Moshe's life, we are no doubt meant to internalize and broaden the message. The world is sustained and we are sustained when we can both come extraordinarily close—to God and to other people—and also step back to make room for the agency of another.”<sup>2</sup>

So as we embrace the holiday of Sukkot, no matter how much of the holiday you will actually spend dwelling in a Sukkah, I encourage you to imagine the Sukkah as an embodiment of the divine presence – hovering close enough to allow us to be vulnerable and take risks, but with enough space and openness that we might grow.

כְּנֶשֶׁר יַעִיר קִנּוּ עַל־גּוֹזְלָיו יִרְחֵף      יִפְרֹשׁ כְּנָפָיו יִקְחֵהוּ וְשָׂאֵהוּ עַל־אֲבָרְתּוֹ :  
 ה' בְּדָד יִנְחֵנוּ      וְאֵין עִמּוֹ אֵל נִכְרָ :  
 יִרְכַּבְהוּ עַל־[בְּמִתִּי] [בְּמוֹתֵי] (אֶרֶץ

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/413818.2?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=bi>