Parshat Chaye Sarah begins with Avraham’s request to acquire a burial site among the Hittites for his recently deceased wife Sarah. The language he uses in describing himself is *ger ve-toshav*.

What does this phrase mean? Why are the two terms separated by a *vav*? Are the two terms *ger* and *toshav* synonymous? A strict *peshuto shel mikra* reading can yield the conclusion that the two terms are indeed synonymous, and that *ger ve-toshav* conveyed the exact same meaning as *ger toshav*. Indeed, a verse in Parshat Bechukotai uses both *ger toshav* and *ger ve-toshav* interchangeably.
According to this explanation, the vav in ger ve-toshav does not serve to distinguish between the two terms. Thus the proper English translation of ger ve-toshav is “resident alien,” not alien and resident.¹

Rashi, however, following Bereshit Rabbah, interprets ger and toshav as two distinct terms. According to Rashi, when Abraham declared, “I am an alien and a resident among you,” he was either stating that he was an alien ger from another land who had subsequently settled as a toshav among the Hittites, or he was saying that he would agree to buy the land as an alien ger, but if forced to, he would take the land by virtue of his rights as a resident toshav.²

The distinction between the alien ger and the resident toshav has been used by various Jewish thinkers throughout the ages. For example, in the Medieval period, the Provençal thinker R. Levi Avraham ben Chaim (c. 1245-c. 1315), in his poem batei ha-nefesh ve-ha-lehashim, uses these two terms in the context of expressing the notion that man’s pure soul is encased and trapped in a physical, material body, but it longs to escape and ascend up high, from where it had come. “Ve-sham nehsav ke-ger zar, lo ke-toshav.”³ And there [in a man’s body] it is considered a foreign ger, not a native toshav…³

Maran Ha-Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, z”l, also interpreted the opposition between ger and toshav in his homiletic explanation of the encounter between Avraham and the Hittites. Rabbi Abraham Besdin summarized the Rav’s ideas on this score as follows:⁴

"We study the narrative of the patriarchal period as though these Jews were lifted out of the ordinary concerns which affected their non-Jewish neighbors. In fact there is no purely covenantal historical experience. The reason is obvious. Abraham lived among various people of divergent faiths. When he negotiated with the sons of Heth (of the Hittites) for a burial plot for his wife Sarah, he defined his status: “I am a stranger [immigrant] and a resident among you” (Gen 23:4). He was basically declaring that the sectarian faith he was propounding did not preclude his commitment to further the welfare of the general society. Indeed, the Midrash teaches: “Great are the righteous of the world for occupying themselves with the habitation of the world.”
2. Sukkot, Judaism and Universalism

The categories that the Rav drew are instructive in framing an appropriate understanding of the universalistic and particularistic aspects of *Chag Ha-Sukkot*. On the one hand, in *Sefer Vayikra*, the laws of *Sukkot* are presented with the same particular focus on *klal yisrael* as the laws concerning the other holidays.

4.

And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: Speak unto the children of Israel, saying: On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the LORD. On the first day shall be a holy convocation; ye shall do no manner of servile work. Seven days ye shall bring an offering made by fire unto the LORD; on the eighth day shall be a holy convocation unto you; and ye shall bring an offering made by fire unto the LORD; it is a day of solemn assembly; ye shall do no manner of servile work... And ye shall take you on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm–trees, and boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook, and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year; it is a statute for ever in your generations; ye shall keep it in the seventh month. Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are home–born in Israel shall dwell in booths; that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

*Leviticus 23: 33-36, 40-43*
Now, it goes without saying that the specific laws of Sukkot: sukkah, lulav, etrog, etc., are mitzvot that fortify the uniqueness of the Jewish people as the nation forever bound by God and His commandments. Yet, at the end of the prophetic book Zechariah, we find an astounding set of verses. These verses come after the prophet’s depiction of the plague at the end days that shall befall the people that war against Jerusalem:

In other words, Zechariah declares that at the End of Days all the nations of the world will come to Jerusalem and observe the festival of Sukkot. Moreover, those non-Jews who do not observe this festival will be punished!

Why was Sukkot, among all the holidays, chosen to be the universal holiday, the one on which (at least in the future), non-Jews will join with Jews in the service of God? Wouldn’t Rosh Hashanah have been a more obvious and appropriate choice?

Rashi (commentary on Zechariah 14:16) connects this notion with a famous Aggada in Masechet Avoda Zara(3a-b):
6.
The nations will then [at the End of Days] plead. 'Offer us the Torah anew and we shall obey it.' But the Holy One, blessed be He, will say to them, 'You foolish ones among peoples, he who took trouble [to prepare] on the eve of the Sabbath can eat on the Sabbath, but he who has not troubled on the eve of the Sabbath, what shall he eat on the Sabbath? Nevertheless, I have an easy command which is called Sukkah, go and carry it out... Straightaway will every one of them betake himself and go and make a booth on the top of his roof; but the Holy One, blessed be He, will cause the sun to blaze forth over them as at the Summer Solstice. and every one of them will trample down his booth and go away.

Avoda Zara 3a-b

Yet the Gemara there only writes that God will give the Gentiles a one-time test, whereas the verses in Zechariah state that "all those nations...shall make a pilgrimage year by year."6

In his commentary to Zechariah 14:17, Rashi draws the connection between Sukkot and water. The reason God will punish the non-Jews for not making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem on Sukkot is, he writes, due to the fact that the commandments that pertain to Sukkot deal with (requests for) rain; both the four species and the libations of water. Those who reject the commandments of Sukkot are consequently punished with the withholding of water. Perhaps this explains the primacy of Sukkot over Rosh Hashanna.

The human need for water lies at the basis of survival. Before the non-Jews can turn to the elevated moral duties of Rosh Hashanna, they are first obligated to pray for the water that their very lives depend upon.

Could Rashi’s connections between Sukkot and water serve as a justification for the
reason why non-Jews also will eventually observe Sukkot? One must be cautious and note that Rashi only attempts an explanation as to why non-Jews will be punished in the future for not observing Sukkot. His comment need not be construed as the reason why non-Jews would have to observe the holiday in the first place.

Radak (R. David Kimhi, in his comment on Zechariah 14:16) explains that as the great power of God will be manifest through the wars of the Messianic period, in every year a day will be set aside to commemorate the wondrous acts of God. According to this view, however, there is nothing special about Chag Ha-Sukkot per se.

Ha-Rav Shlomo Goren z”l, in his book Torat Ha-Mo’adim, after discussing Rashi and Radak’s views, presented his own approach. He suggested that the future observance of Hag Ha-Sukkot by non-Jews is connected with a well-known Talmudic tradition that establishes the following link: the seventy bulls that are brought to the Temple, slaughtered and sacrificed during the seven days of Sukkot (Numbers 28: 12–34) correspond to the seventy nations of the world.

The Gemara states the following:

**7.**

R. Elazar stated: To what do the seventy bulls (that are offered during the seven days of Sukkot) correspond? To the seventy nations (of the world). To what does the single bull (of the eighth day of Shemini Atzeret) correspond? To the unique nation (of Israel)

_Sukkah 55b_

Another source adds the following note:

**8.**

_On the Eighth Day You Shall Have A Solemn Assembly_ (Num. 29:35): This bears on what Scripture says: _In return for my love they are my adversaries: but I am all prayer_ (Psalms 109:4). You find that on the Tabernacles festival Israel offers to Him seventy bulls as atonement for the seventy nations. Israel says: ‘Sovereign of the Worlds!’ Behold, we offer for them seventy bulls and they ought to love us, yet they hate us.’ The Holy One, blessed be He, in consequence, said to them: ‘Now therefore, offer a sacrifice on your own behalf: _On The Eighth Day You Shall Have A Solemn Assembly: You shall present a burnt-offering, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the L-rd: One bull, one ram_ (Num. 29:36).

_Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah_ 21:24
Moreover, *Midrash Shohar Tov*, the *Midrash* on *Tehillim*, poignantly points out the lament of the Jews and adds the connection between the sacrifices on behalf of the non-Jewish world and the universal need for water:  

Rav Goren suggested that it is biblical mandate to offer the seventy sacrifices on behalf of the nations of the world that formed the basis of the Zechariah vision concerning non-Jews and the Chag of Sukkot at the End of Days. That is, this concern with the nations of the world, the concern that was biblically expressed with the seventy bulls, will be expressed in the future period (and at least to a certain extent, required) as well. Some non-Jews might very well fail the test. Such is the position of the Gemara in *Avoda Zara*. If they pass the test, they realize that they also are ultimately dependent upon the One God, who beneficently bestows water to all human beings.

It is important to notice that according to this approach, the sacrifices in the Jewish Temple on behalf of the nations of the world continue whether or not the non-Jews join us. Moreover, they continue even though the non-Jewish world may be adversarial towards us. Such a situation is truly unfortunate, but the basic orientation of sacrifices on behalf of the nations of the world remains the same.

One can easily subsume the universalistic aspect of the sacrifices on Sukkot with the “toshav” aspect of the Jews’ stance towards the rest of humanity as explained by the Rav. By the same token, the particularistic aspect of the korbanot of Shemini Atzeret, which represents the unique relationship of the Jewish people with God, fits with the “ger” aspect of Jewish existence in the world. Although we fully participate in the endeavors of mankind, we also have concerns of our own, as members of the unique covenantal community of Jews, bound to a brit with God.

Concern with sacrifices for the nations, for all that it is a universalistic concern, does not mark the end boundary of Jewish involvement with the non-Jewish world. As will be seen from this concluding quote from R. Besdin’s summary of the Rav’s notion of the universal and the covenantal, Jews are also enjoined to involve themselves in relieving the physical suffering and depredations of non-Jews and to better the world at large:  

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9. In Return For My Love They Are My Adversaries (Psalms 109:4)…The people of Israel said to the nations of the earth: Because of us, the Holy One, blessed Be He, does all these things for you, and yet you hate us, as is said In Return For My Love They Are My Adversaries. At the festival of Tabernacles we offer up seventy bulls for the seventy nations and we pray that rain will come down for them. Yet In return for my love they are my adversaries: Still I am all prayer (Psalms 109:4).

*Midrash Shohar Tov* 109:4
The modern Jew is entangled in the activities of the Gentile society in numerous ways—economically, politically, culturally, and on some levels, socially. We share in the universal experience. The problems of humanity, war and peace, political stability or anarchy, and pollution transcend the boundaries of ethnic groups...Jewish concerns are not exclusively parochial. It is our duty as human beings to contribute our energies and creativity to alleviate the pressing needs and anguish of mankind and to contribute to its welfare.

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2 Rashi to Genesis 23:4. Rashi (ad loc.) writes that his second interpretation is midrash aggadah.


4 Abraham R. Besdin, Man of Faith in the Modern World: Reflections of the Rav, Volume Two (Ktav Publishing House, Hoboken New Jersey, 1989), Chapter VIII (“The Universal and the covenantal”), pp. 74-75. The italics are mine. The Midrash the Rav cited can be found in Midrash (Ha-)Hefetz to tGenesis 26:18, the verse that describes the wells that the patriarch Isaac dug.

5 According to many commentators, since Egypt is watered by the overflow of the Nile River and does not need rain, the nature of its punishment must perforce differ than that of other nations and does not consist in the suspension of rain water. See Rashi, Massekhet Sotah 13a, s.v. kedei. Rashi to Zechariah 14:18 interprets the punishment as follows: the Nile River will not overflow, for the Nile serves as the analogous “rain source” of Egypt.


7 Shlomo Goren, Torat Ha-Moadim, (Avraham Zioni, Tel Aviv 1964).


10 Man of Faith in the Modern World, p. 75