

Potomac Torah Study Center

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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We mourn those of our people who have perished since attacks have resumed. May the IDF and the U.S. soon force Iran to seek peace, and may 5787 bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

Note: Vol. 14 will start with Bereishit in two weeks.

After a few days of rain, the storm moved east of us to become a northeastern monster to make Sukkot 5787 memorable in the northeast. While the storm organizes a hundred miles east of us, I was able to erect our Sukkah. Those of us in the greater Washington, DC area have missed a beloved feature of summer. A late frost in the spring killed all the peach buds, so we have not had farm fresh peaches this summer. For some reason, we were able to find excellent local peaches in Gettysburg, PA – but even the farm stands in our area had only peaches from the Carolinas or California – both picked green so they would rot but not ripen properly. As we go into Sukkot, traditionally the last time to bring first fruit to the Temple, those of us in our area feel the absence of local stone fruit to celebrate this year.

The key event we celebrate is obvious for Pesach and Shavuot. Pesach celebrates God taking our ancestors from slavery in Egypt to eventual freedom in the land that He had promised to our Avot. The key event for Shavuot is the Revelation, Hashem presenting the Torah to all Jews, both those present in person and all Jews yet to come. However, the Torah does not explicitly state an event that we recall for Sukkot. Rabbi David Fohrman and his colleagues at alephbeta.org piece together material from several sources to fill in the message for us.

A place called Sukkot appears early in the Torah. Returning after twenty years studying at Lavan's university of deception, after encountering Esav, Yaakov goes on and stops at a place where he builds a home and a shelter for his livestock. He calls the place "Sukkot" (Bereshis 33:17). When B'Nai Yisrael leave Egypt, they leave from Ramses and spend their first night at Sukkot (Shemot 12:37). Since the people had not yet crossed the Sea of Reeds, I assume that they encounter primitive shelter suited for livestock and use the family name, "Sukkot," for a shanty town or crude pens for livestock. This family name reappears in Sefer Shemot.

Since Hashem had told our ancestors to eat the Pascal sacrifice with matzah, Rabbi Fohrman relates that our ancestors are still eating matzah the next day, after they rush out suddenly in the middle of the night early on 15 Nisan. The first evening on their travels, B'Nai Yisrael have only matzah to eat and no shelter except the crude livestock pens for shelter. As Rabbi Fohrman states, our ancestors must spend the night sleeping outdoors with Bessie the Cow. This interpretation demonstrates that the holiday of Sukkot commemorates the same event as Pesach – God taking our ancestors out of Egypt. Pesach focuses on the miracles while Sukkot focuses on Hashem's protecting our people for all their time in the Midbar. Our tradition is that Sukkot represents Hashem's cloud, which acts like a GPS in front of our travels and a barrier from danger, especially when Hashem moves it behind the people to keep away the Egyptians and other dangerous enemies.

Why, then, do we celebrate Sukkot six months after Pesach? Sukkot represents the fruit and grain harvest, the end point of our freedom, when we can enjoy the returns of having our own land. In a real sense, Pesach represents the beginning of our freedom while Sukkot represents the climax or achievement of the goal. In short, Pesach and Sukkot essentially celebrate the same event in history, the first full day when our ancestors leave Egypt and put their fate in the hands of Hashem.

Yom Tov with my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, was always a pleasure – and visiting with his widow, Elizabeth Cahan, remains special. I still remember Rabbi Cahan's last service at Temple Beth Abraham in Oakland, California, more than fifty years ago. I was back in Berkeley for a few days and able to be at that service, on Shavuot in 1974. At the time, I did not know that I would be following him to Potomac, Maryland only a year later – where his career took off and where he was my mentor for the rest of his life. Rabbi Cahan started me on my journey learning about my heritage, and I am still learning so many years later.

Shabbat Shalom; Chag Samaich; Moadim l'simcha,

Hannah & Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations. 2026 has been an especially difficult year for AlephBeta.org, so please consider donating now.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeezl Esther; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Rena Michal bat Sara, Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Haftarat Sukkot: A Thousand Etrogim Cannot Replace One Aravah

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone 5787 (2026)

It was Sunday, September 29, 1963, the eleventh of Tishrei, the day after Yom Kippur.

A young Rav Yoel Bin Nun had just completed his first forty days of study at Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav in Jerusalem. Before returning to Haifa for Sukkot, he went to say goodbye to his rebbe, Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook, who lived in Geulah, and accompanied him on the walk back to the yeshiva, as Rav Tzvi Yehuda had difficulty walking.

As they approached Kikar Shabbat, they encountered a large public chareidi rally. Suddenly, Rav Tzvi Yehuda grabbed the young Rav Yoel's hand and began walking with extraordinary speed. Rav Yoel would later describe him as moving almost as though he were fleeing from a fire.

Only once they had passed the square and reached Rechov Strauss did Rav Tzvi Yehuda slow down. Catching his breath, he turned to Rav Yoel and offered an extraordinary reflection.

There are Jews, he explained, who resemble the etrog.

The etrog possesses both taste and fragrance. In the famous rabbinic symbolism of the Four Species, it represents those blessed both with Torah learning and with mitzvot.

But then Rav Tzvi Yehuda asked a simple question.

With what did the Jewish people encircle the altar in the Beit HaMikdash during Sukkot?

Was it with etrogim?

No!

It was with the aravah.

The willow possesses neither taste nor fragrance. Rabbinic tradition sees it as representing Jews who may appear to possess neither Torah scholarship nor an impressive record of religious observance. And yet it was the aravah that encircled the altar during the holiday of Sukkot (Sukkah 4:5). [emphasis added]

Then Rav Tzvi Yehuda made the statement that Rav Yoel Bin Nun would never forget:

A thousand etrogim cannot replace one aravah. [emphasis added]

Indeed, to this day, Aravot trees adorn the entrance of Rav Yoel Bin Nun's home — a loving living reminder of that encounter. Each year before Sukkot a sign adorns the trees offering all who wish to come and cut aravot.

The message goes to the heart of Sukkot.

Religious life can tempt us to create a hierarchy of Jewish worth. We naturally admire the "etrogim": those whose Torah knowledge is profound, whose mitzvah observance is meticulous, whose lives emit the fragrance of religious devotion.

But admiration becomes dangerous when it leads us to conclude that those who do not look like the etrog are somehow dispensable.

They are not. [emphasis added]

The aravah is not a deficient etrog; it has its own place in the service of God. Remove the aravah from the Four Species, and the mitzvah itself is incomplete.

After the spiritual grandeur of Rosh HaShanah, when God is enthroned above us, and the humility of Yom Kippur, when we stand before Him, Sukkot reminds us to make room for God in this world, to find God among the ordinary.

That is why we leave our permanent homes and construct a new dwelling – from simple materials, creating something sacred in the process.

Our tefillot expand this idea: *Ufros aleinu sukkat shlomecha* — "*Spread over us Your sukkah of peace.*" **Such peace can only be achieved when we embrace the other. [emphasis added]**

It is easy to build community with those who look like us; far harder to recognize the holiness of those who do not. The greatest threats to the Jewish people are not only those that come from without, but also those that emerge from within.

The moment one group of Jews begins to believe that another group is unnecessary, we endanger something fundamental about the Jewish people.

The Four Species can only fulfill their purpose when they are held together.

So too with the Jewish people. [emphasis added]

This vision extends even beyond the Jewish people.

The Sukkot offerings in the Beit HaMikdash were understood by our Sages as having significance for all the nations of the world. At the very moment **when we celebrate the particular covenant between God and the Jewish people, the Torah asks us to maintain concern for humanity, by offering sacrifices for all nations.** [emphasis added]

Sukkot teaches us that particularism need not produce isolation, and religious conviction need not lead us to diminish those who are different from us.

The Jewish people can only fulfill its mission when we remember the lesson Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook taught a young student on the streets of Jerusalem more than sixty years ago: We need the etrog, with its Torah, its fragrance and its beauty.

But we also need the aravah.

For a thousand etrogim cannot replace even one.

Chag Sameach

* President and Rosh Yeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone.

OTS offers a collection of reflections for the High Holiday period, **Seeds of Renewal**. You may download this publication at: https://mail.yahoo.com/d/folders/1/messages/AABmg2Qsk2uKH8eGEHheqO6eYMn?.src=ym&reason=n8_norrin

<https://ots.org.il/sukkot-a-thousand-etrogim-cannot-replace-one-aravah/>

The Greatness of Moshe Rabbeinu and his Non-Kosher Birth

By Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo *

Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moshe — whom God singled out, face to face, for the various signs and portents that God sent him to display in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his courtiers and his whole country, and for all the great might and awesome power that Moshe displayed before all Israel. Devarim 34:10-12

As unusually great as Moshe certainly was, the Jewish tradition does everything possible to keep him human. The fear that we might deify him is real, and wherever possible the Torah prevents such a suggestion.

Perhaps this is why, at the end of Moshe's life, the Torah recalls how it began. Moshe's birth and upbringing in Pharaoh's palace, while highly unusual, was not miraculous. His birth and his childhood were both normal. His curiosity about the people enslaved by Pharaoh led to his rescue of a Jew in distress, resulting in his subsequent flight to Midian and marriage to Tziporah. The only unusual event is the encounter with God at the burning bush, but the rest of his life remained within the boundaries of normalcy. That is, until chapter seven in the book of Shemot!

A lesson in genealogy

But just before chapter seven, there is a classic example of how far the Torah goes out of its way to ensure that Moshe will never be deified. While telling the story of how Moshe tried to persuade Pharaoh to let the Israelites go, the Torah suddenly and awkwardly interrupts the narrative of the Exodus to tell us at great length about the genealogy of Moshe and Aaron!^[1] We hear about their parents, their aunts, and uncles, and other family relations.

And then, as if we have no clue who Moshe and Aaron are, the chapter ends with: *“It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt to free the Israelites from the Egyptians; these are the same Moshe and Aaron.”*^[2]

What is the point of this break? Why do we need their genealogy in the middle of the story? Why repeat that it was Moshe and Aaron who took the Israelites out of Egypt? Don't we already know that?

The need for normalcy

In a masterly stroke, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch^[3] tells us that in these verses at the end of Chapter 6, the Torah puts an end, once and for all, to any possibility of deification of Moshe and Aaron, especially Moshe.

Until this point in the book of Shemot, nothing particularly miraculous has happened. But soon will come the full story of the Exodus — the miraculous plagues, the splitting of the Reed Sea, Moshe's ascent to the top of Mount Sinai to receive the Aseret HaDibrot (inaccurately translated as the Ten Commandments).

And so, just before this shift in events, the Torah emphasises that both of these incredible men were mere human beings of flesh and blood. They were not born of angels or other heavenly beings. They came from human families.

Until this point, no one could doubt this. After all, Moshe's and Aaron's meetings with Pharaoh had completely failed, and even made things worse. But now, with the miraculous departure from Egypt and all the open miracles, people might have believed that Moshe and Aaron had become Divine beings who could no longer be counted among normal men.

Instead, the Torah makes it clear that they were human beings, with parents, uncles, aunts, and family. The men who brought about these miracles were the same Moshe and Aaron as they always were. It was to these people, and not Divine beings, that God spoke.

This does not in any way diminish the greatness of Moshe and Aaron. Not anyone can receive the word of God and become a prophet. Far from it. Only those who have worked on themselves for years and transformed themselves through many struggles and tribulations, as Moshe and Aaron did, can perhaps achieve some spiritual greatness. But even so, they never become Deities.

In a cutting observation, Rabbi Hirsch adds:

We know well enough how, in later times, a Jew whose genealogical table was not available — and because it was not available and because he brought the world a few sparks of light borrowed from the man Moshe — became to be considered by nations as begotten from G-d.^[4]

A human being who is presumed to be born from a virgin and therefore “God's son” is the best proof that he must be a false Messiah and prophet.

Moshe's “Box of Vermin”

There is, however yet another reason why God chose these two men: They were born of a forbidden marriage! Their father Amram married Jochebed, who was his aunt.^[5] Such a relationship is strictly forbidden by the Torah.

It's true that this prohibition was not yet in force, as the Torah had not yet been given. But once the Torah was given, this was considered to be one of the forbidden sexual relationships.^[6]

It is most peculiar that the greatest Jew ever to exist was born of a relationship which was later strictly prohibited by the very Torah he would come to write! [emphasis added]

The Gemara states: *“One does not appoint a leader over the public unless he has a basket of worms hanging behind him, so that if his heart becomes proud, they say to him: ‘Look behind you!’”*^[7]

The blemish that makes a leader

The commentator Rabbi Chizkiyahu ben Monoach,[8] known as the Chizkuni, notes that this goes beyond ensuring that a leader does not become overly proud. A person who has no blemish in his ancestry cannot function effectively as a leader at all. To be exemplary, one must carry a similar burden as the people one leads. Just as the general public carries various blemishes, so must the leader be tainted with imperfections.

And so **Moshe became the greatest Jew ever to exist, not because he was perfect, not because he was a deity, not because he was the son of God who should be worshipped, and not because he was born of a perfect marriage, but precisely because he was none of these.** [emphasis added]

Thus, the message delivered by the Torah with its last words is a strong condemnation of anybody who attempts to deify rabbis while they live, and even more after their deaths. Even in death, Moshe was not allowed to become an object of worship, for we are told that “no one knows his burial place to this day” (Devarim 34:6).

Notes:

[1] Shemot 6:14

[2] Shemot 6:27.

[3] Frankfurt, 1808-1888.

[4] Rabbi Hirsch on Shemot 6:14.

[5] Shemot 6:20.

[6] Vayikra: 18:12-13.

[7] Yoma 22a.

[8] The Chizkuni lived in the thirteenth century in France and is known as a sub-commentary on Rashi.

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https://cardozoacademy.org/thoughts-to-ponder/the-greatness-of-moshe-rabbeinu-and-his-non-kosher-birth/?utm_source=Cardozo+Academy+Mailing+List&utm_campaign=7bbf0feec6-Cardozo+for+the+Shabbat+Table&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_ee36bb9088-7bbf0feec6-462069978

Succos: The Source of Our Blessings

By Rabbi Label Lam © 2002

One of my earliest childhood memories of being in Synagogue was the all too frequent announcement; alternately, “All rise! Please be seated!” I remember thinking, “Why don’t they make up their mind?” When considering the rapid transition from the “Days of Awe” to the “Time of our Happiness”, on Sukkos, one might be left with the same feeling. What’s the deal here?! Is the relationship one of overwhelming fear or abundant love, or both somehow?

Avraham manifested the epitome of human dedication when he stood willing to sacrifice his principles, his reputation, his future, his beloved son, with one swipe of the knife. We know how the story ends. The Almighty was testing to see if he was willing to give it all up and he lived up to the test. Today we continue to draw from the fount of the account gained by his noble intentions. In the last instant he was interrupted and an announcement was made “Now I know you fear G-d, because you did not withhold your son, your only son, from Me!”

That must have been the height of heights, but then something even greater happened which seems to have eclipsed the prior achievement. How could that be? We are told that Avraham noticed a ram in caught in the thicket, which he subsequently sacrificed in place of his son, and a second Divine announcement was made, "I swear, so says Hashem, because you did this (the sacrifice of the ram) and you did not withhold your son your only son, I will bless those who bless you. I will increase your seed like the stars of the heavens and like the sand of the sea shore and your seed will inherit the gates of its enemies. All the nations of the world will be blessed through your descendants because you have hearkened to My voice!"

What's the big deal with the ram? Why after having demonstrated his willingness to give up his son he is titled as one who fears Hashem, which is no small matter, but when he brings some stray creature in his stead, the act of bringing his son is again evoked and mountains of blessing begin to flow in his general direction?

Imagine it's mid-winter and on Shabbos eight feet of snow falls. After Shabbos your boss or significant authoritative other calls and all but commands that you come immediately and dig him out so he can catch a plane. Immediately you get into serious gear, winter gear, and spend the next two hours just getting your self out from under the snow. Now you hurry to the boss's house to perform the same task on his extra long driveway.

When you arrive you notice the driveway is clear already. The plow must have just come. Your boss is already strolling to the waiting Town-Car with is luggage. He thanks you for your effort for coming and titles you a dutiful worker on his way by. Suddenly he notices you running to your car. At first he assumes you are looking to escape before he innovates some other mission impossible. Rather, he witnesses something that amazes him. You take out your broom and dust off his mailbox and sweep a few crumb of snow from here and there. Then as you go back to your car, he runs after you, in tears, offering you a raise for your devotion for having swept around a little. What went right here?

Maybe when you came, initially, your motive was fear, thinking, "What would be the result of not coming? How can I not go when the boss calls!?" By merely arriving you had demonstrated your loyalty. You would have been forgiven for escaping at that moment before he changed his mind and threw another monumental task your way. However, when you took out the broom and swept up, even though the act is significantly smaller, you showed that your original motive was not fear alone but an abiding love, a sincere desire to come close. Therefore the treasure house of blessing is opened. Raises and bonuses are in order.

The same applies to Avraham and the wayward ram and to us in this season of seeming mixed emotions. Simply sitting in a Sukkah reveals retroactively that the devotions demonstrated during the "Days of Awe" were not done due to dread alone but were driven by a deeper dynamic. That tiny extra touch excites a cover of love above and is the source of our blessings!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5763-succos/>

Holy Imperfection: Torah Words from Rabbi Linzer on This Sukkot

By Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2020

[Ed. note: remembering 6 years ago and an unusual Sukkot]

The Rabbis tell us that the mitzvah to dwell in a sukkah means that we are, for this week, to tzei midrat keva ve'sheiv bi'dirat aray – to leave our established, permanent abode and live in a temporary dwelling.

In other years, I have understood the message to be that by living in a temporary dwelling we become aware that the normal stability and predictability of our lives – our established abode – is actually an illusion. The Israelites, when they dwelled in huts in the Wilderness, were aware that it was only because of the Clouds of Glory that they were able to survive. It was not the huts that provided protection and shelter, but God. Our living in a sukkah reminds us that this is our reality as well, that it is not our house or our job that protects us, but God. At the end of the week, after we have hopefully internalized this awareness, we bring it back with us into our homes, so that it can become a lens through which we live our predictable, stable lives.

This year, however, the lesson is a different one. For this year, we do not live in a stable reality. The entire world changed drastically on us, and we have become painfully aware that our past reality was not nearly as firm as we thought. And it is

not just the present. It is the future which is so unstable, and hence so deeply unsettling. When will this be over? What will the next month look like? What will the next year look like? This week schools are open, but for how long? And if they close, when will they reopen after that?

We are living in an unstable reality. We are living in that *dirat aray*. The message of Sukkot this year is to embrace that reality, to embrace the fact that our lives, when they are unstable, are not going to be perfect. But if we can own that, then this imperfection can be holy.

All the laws of how a Sukkah is to be built are about improvising and making do with less. A sukkah doesn't need four walls, three are good enough. The Rabbis then tell us that you don't even need three: If you just have a little bit more than two, the very beginning of a third wall, that also counts. You don't need the wall to be of full height – three feet high is good enough. And it doesn't need to be solid – gaps of up to nine inches are fine. And on and on. Then there are the Rabbinic concepts of *gud asik mechitza*, *gud achit mechitzah*, and *dofen akuma* – a partial wall magically extends upwards or downwards, and invalid schach at the end of the sukkah can be looked at as if it were a bending –wall. These are all showing us that making do with less is ok, is part of our lives. And with a little imagination, we can see the gaps in our lives as if they were filled and complete.

I once had a student who had very little money. He couldn't afford a nice, canvas sukkah. I loved to get his calls before sukkot. They went something like this: "So, I was walking down the street and saw that someone had discarded a big piece of cardboard, so I took it, and want to use it as a wall, but it doesn't extend all the way, but if I put it near the edge, it can sort of reach this sheet that I am using for the other wall – is that kosher?" Here is someone who was building a sukkah as the Rabbis imagined! No easy prefab sukkah for him, but taking the world as it is, and making do with what comes to hand.

A final lesson that the Rabbis teach is that *sukkah mi'kol makom, kasher* – however the sukkah gets built, its fine. And while this is true and yet another teaching that we can accept and embrace our imperfect reality, there exists a special mitzvah to build the sukkah ourselves. For the way to truly make this imperfection a holy one is by throwing ourselves into it and bringing our skills and talents to the fore.

So many people told me that this recent Yom Kippur was not disappointing in the least. It was actually one of this most beautiful Yom Kippurs that they had ever had (of course, we must remember, that for others it was one of the most difficult Yom Kippurs). The davening was shorter, so they had more time to think about the prayers themselves. Some minyan were outdoors, and for those who participated in them, and they share with me that praying outdoors was a truly special experience. The small minyan that people participate in were small and intimate and had a real beauty and sense of connectedness. And most of all – that the small minyanim that took place outside the synagogue were do-it-yourself affairs. Yom Kippur services did not come prepackaged from the shul. People had to come together – one person lent their yard, another constructed the mechitza. People who had never read Torah on Yom Kippur or lead the prayers or served as gabbais, stepped up to the plate and did so. And you know what? It wasn't perfect. But it was beautiful. Because we were building it ourselves. And we embraced that imperfection, and were able to see God and holiness present where we had not seen it before.

This Sukkot, we are living in an unstable world are well aware that our lives lack a certain stability, that society is not as it was before and will not be so for some time to come. But it is in this reality that we can do the mitzvah of building a sukkah, we can bring our talents to the fore to make it not only livable, but truly special. It won't be perfect. But by embracing this imperfection, we can find new ways to connect with and discover God's presence in our lives. We can live lives of holy imperfection.

All the best and chag sameach.

From my archives.

Insights from Chassidic Tradition

By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz *

[Ed. note: Rabbi Katz is on hiatus for July and August. His outstanding parsha messages, including insights from the Chassidic tradition, will resume when he returns.]

* Chair of the Talmud Department and the Director of the Lindenbaum Center for Halakhic Studies, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY.

Angel for Shabbat: Succoth

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Sometimes it takes a crisis to remind us of the transience of life. It might be an illness, the death of a loved one, an accident, a shocking and tragic news report. At these crisis moments, we suddenly and starkly remember that we are mortal, that life on this earth is temporary.

When people confront their own mortality, they often come to the realization that time is precious; that life is too valuable to be frittered away on nonsense; that it is self-destructive to engage in petty feuds or egotistical competitions. It can take a crisis to help us live on a higher, happier level. Facing the transience of life, we take our living moments more seriously.

Succoth is a festival tuned in to the issue of life's transience. The succah is a temporary structure, reminiscent of the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness in ancient times. It doesn't have a roof, reminding us that we are subject to the vicissitudes of nature. The lulav, etrog, aravot and hadasim remind us of the harvest, of the recurring cycles of nature, the cycles of birth, growth, decline and death.

Interestingly, Succoth is known in our tradition as *Zeman Simhateinu*, the time of our rejoicing. On one level, this refers to the rejoicing of the harvest. On a deeper level, though, it may be alluding to the joy and inner freedom we attain when we confront the transience of life.

If we sulk in gloomy thoughts of the ephemeral quality of life, we can become grim and depressed. Succoth teaches that thoughts of life's transience actually lead to happiness — not self-pity. It is our very mortality which provides the intensity and excitement of life.

That being said, we are strengthened when we turn our minds from human mortality to God's eternity. There is an all-encompassing, undying Power that embraces and transcends all time and all change.

In Psalm 121, the Psalmist muses: *"I lift my eyes unto the mountains, whence comes my help? My help is from the Lord, Maker of heaven and earth."* Why does the Psalmist look to the mountains? What do mountains have to do with the Psalmist's call for help?

Most natural phenomena reflect change. The sun rises and sets. The moon goes through its phases. The stars sparkle at night, but are not visible during the day. Oceans, rivers and lakes are in constant motion. Mountains, though, are steady and unchanging (at least to the human eye). The Psalmist is crying out for help, and is seeking an image of something with permanence, something that can be depended upon: mountains.

In a similar vein, one of the names attributed to God is "Tsur" — Rock. In turning to the Lord, we seek an image of something powerful and unchanging.

While Succoth highlights the transience of life, it also turns our thoughts to the Eternal God who is not transient. The succah recalls the wanderings of the Israelites — but also the Divine Providence that watched over them for forty years. The lulav and etrog remind us of the changing seasons; but also of the Eternal God who created nature and the natural rhythms. We wave the lulav and etrog in all directions, as a symbol that God's presence is everywhere, all-encompassing, and complete.

Succoth reminds us to keep things in perspective, to appreciate the transience of life and the Eternity of God. It is the time of our rejoicing in the beauties of life, and the meaning of life.

Moadim leSimha.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3492>

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Thoughts for Succoth: Benjamin Disraeli and Succoth

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Interesting insights about Succoth have come from the pen of Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881), the First Earl of Beaconsfield. Disraeli was of Jewish birth, whose family had been associated with the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation in London. Although his father had Benjamin baptized to Anglicanism at age 12, Disraeli never denied his Jewish roots. He rose to become the first — and thus far only — British Prime Minister of Jewish ancestry.

Anti-Semites never forgave Disraeli's Jewishness and constantly identified him as a Jew in spite of his conversion to Anglicanism. In response to a vicious anti-Semitic comment made in the British parliament, Disraeli famously retorted: *"Yes, I am a Jew, and when the ancestors of the Right Honourable Gentleman were brutal savages in an unknown island, mine were priests in the Temple of Solomon."*

Disraeli writes about Succoth in his novel, *Tancred*, originally published in 1847. Tancred was a young British nobleman who had a spiritual longing to visit the Holy Land. When he arrived, he spent time with a Jewish family and became acquainted with Jewish religious life. His visit coincided with Succoth, and he was told that this is a great national festival celebrating the harvest. He was shown the lulav and etrog, symbols of the autumn harvest. Tancred was deeply impressed.

Disraeli writes: *"The vineyards of Israel have ceased to exist, but the eternal law enjoins the children of Israel still to celebrate the vintage. A race that persist in celebrating their vintage, although they have no fruits to gather, will regain their vineyards. What sublime inexorability in the law! But what indomitable spirit in the people!"*

Disraeli notes that it is easier for "the happier Sephardim, the Hebrews who have never quitted the sunny regions that are laved by the Midland Ocean," to observe the festival, since they can identify with the climate and setting of the early generations of Israelites who celebrated Succoth. "But picture to yourself the child of Israel in the dingy suburb or the squalid quarter of some bleak northern town, where there is never a sun that can at any rate ripen grapes. Yet he must celebrate the vintage of purple Palestine! The law has told him, though a denizen in an icy clime, that he must dwell for seven days in a bower...."

He continues with a description of the ignominies which Jews suffer in their ghettos in Europe "living amid fogs and filth, never treated with kindness, seldom with justice....Conceive such a being, an object to you of prejudice, dislike, disgust, perhaps hatred. The season arrives, and the mind and heart of that being are filled with images and passions that have been ranked in all ages among the most beautiful and the most genial of human experience; filled with a subject the most vivid, the most graceful, the most joyous, and the most exuberant...the harvest of the grape in the native regions of the vine."

The downtrodden Jews, in observance of Succoth, find real joy in life. They decorate their Succahs as beautifully as they can; their families gather together to eat festive meals in the Succah. The outside world may be cruel and ugly; but their inner life is joyous and noble. Their external conditions may not seem too happy, but their internal happiness is real.

The Jews, while remembering the glories of the Israelite past, also dream of the future glories of the Israelites when their people will be restored to their ancient greatness.

Disraeli points to an important truth: happiness is essentially an internal phenomenon, a matter of one's attitude and interpretation of reality. External conditions are less vital to genuine happiness than one's internal state of mind.

By celebrating Succoth over the many centuries of exile, the Jewish people was able to maintain an inner strength and happiness, a vivid sense of the past and a powerful vision for the future. We are fortunate today to be living at a time when the sovereign State of Israel has been re-established. We may celebrate Succoth with the added joy of knowing that our historic dreams have begun to be realized.

We have regained our vineyards...we must aspire to the day when we may enjoy our vineyards in peace and security, free from the threats and hatred which continue to be aimed against our people. "A race that persist in celebrating their vintage...will regain their vineyards." A people who persist in dreaming of a messianic era will ultimately see that dream fulfilled.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/thoughts-succoth>

You Will be Defined. The Question Is: By Whom?

By Maxine Angel *

I grew up in Tampa, Florida. It is a wonderful place. I was raised in a secular family with a strong sense of Jewish identity, but I did not understand what that identity meant or why being Jewish was something distinct. From a young age, my public-school classmates told me, "You're not white. You're Jewish." I didn't quite grasp this. It created a sense of otherness, but it also felt like something special, even precious. While I thought I looked like most of my classmates, they saw something else. There were not many of us Jewish students, and we were all told the same thing, very matter of factly. It was simply accepted, along with whatever difference it meant to be Jewish.

As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks observed, if you do not define your identity, others will define it for you and not always kindly. My experience at the time was benign and I did not yet appreciate what being Jewish meant, but the world had already begun to tell me.

Before I came to understand Judaism, I came to antisemitism. I learned how Jews were seen long before I understood who Jews were. That is not a stable way to build identity. It would be many years before I began to internalize what it means to be Jewish and observe our practices. I remember hearing phrases like "Jewish values," but I did not know what those values were. I was fortunate to have strong history teachers, and we learned about World War II and the Holocaust, but I had no real sense of the thousands of years that came before. Years later, I encountered Tanakh, tefillot, and mitzvot, along with the teachings of Rabbi Sacks and other giants. I began to see the difference between an identity shaped by

others' hatred and one rooted in knowledge, practice, a tradition of strength, and most importantly a connection with HaShem. [emphasis added]

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks warned that Jews would be defined by others whether they chose it or not. This has been the pattern for centuries. Antisemitism has taken many forms, a dynamic hatred that adapts to the weaknesses of each society in which it takes hold. The writer Vasily Grossman, who witnessed both Nazi and Soviet brutality, understood something essential about antisemitism. It is not simply hatred of Jews. It reveals something about the society that produces it and the individuals who perpetuate it.

It often presents itself in acceptable, even noble terms, cloaking hostility in the language of morality, whether as opposition to a religion, a race, or, as we see today, a country in the popular form of anti-Zionism. It is all too easy for a sacred religious identity to become defined in response to hatred, rather than grounded in its own inheritance. When those who hate you define you, the result is an unstable and uncertain identity. It pulls you away from the stable foundation laid millennia before and fills the space of faith and practice.

I thought I could recognize propaganda. I thought it was something obvious, something you could spot and reject. But over time I came to see that it is often far more subtle. It does not always announce itself. It adapts. It shifts language. And when it comes to Jews, it has done this for centuries. Antisemitism has followed a familiar pattern throughout history. Whatever a society fears or resents, Jews are blamed. This is why the accusations can be contradictory. Jews are cast as outsiders and, at the same time, as wielding hidden influence. Too weak and too powerful. The claims do not need to make sense. They only need to serve a purpose. When identity is shaped in response to those claims, it becomes unstable and uncertain, dependent on those who deny your place and, at times, your right to exist. The contradictions do not cancel each other out. They coexist. That is part of the point. I experienced this firsthand recently.

I ran for the Teaneck Board of Education this past fall. It was an all-consuming experience for myself and my family. My running mate and I ran on a platform of accountability, community, and excellence and we ran a campaign of integrity. We expected a tough race. What we did not expect was the level of personal attack. There were six candidates. I was the only one identified by religion. I was labeled a "Jewish activist." While I don't object to the term, it was not how I would describe myself. More importantly, it immediately marked me as different. Throughout the campaign, I encountered a familiar contradiction: I was cast simultaneously as an outsider and as someone connected to powerful groups exercising insider control. My running mate, who is not Jewish, was also targeted. He was portrayed as having compromised himself by aligning with the Jews.

This is part of the power of antisemitism. Some dismiss it as politics, a dirty sport if there ever was one. But these attacks went beyond policy or disagreement. They became personal and drew on popular tropes. On election day, a box truck drove through town with a large screen displaying the message "Stop the non-public school takeover." The message reduced complex public issues to a simple threat and the messaging was effective. I did not win, though the race was close. My running mate came even closer. I accept the result. What I do not accept are methods that moved beyond policy and into something more personal and troubling.

The challenges we face today are new in form but familiar in substance. The language and setting change, but the pattern remains. A grounded Jewish identity, shaped by our sacred texts, faith, practices, and history, and strengthened by our families and communities, provides stability where none exists in the accusations of others. It is not a shield against hatred, but it allows us to withstand it without being defined or destroyed by it. That kind of identity does not emerge on its own. It must be taught, learned, and lived. It is the responsibility of each individual to embody it with gratitude and strength, of parents to teach it to their children, and of each generation to pass it on.

* Maxine Angel lives in Teaneck, NJ, with her husband Rabbi Hayyim and their four children. They are a long-time homeschool family, among other things. This article appears in issue 48 of *Conversations*, the journal of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3493>

Succos: Working for G-d
By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2017 Teach 613

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel

The Talmud tells us that in the end of days, when it becomes clear that there is reward for doing mitzvos, there will be nations of the world who will wish for a second chance to accept the Mitzvos. Although at that time it really will be too late, the Talmud says that Hashem will offer them an “easy mitzvah” which they can try, and through which they can prove themselves. The “easy mitzvah” that Hashem will offer them is the mitzvah of succah.

The Talmud questions why it is called an “easy mitzvah” and suggests that it is a mitzvah that can be done at no cost. One can take discarded items for the walls, and leftovers from the harvest for schach, and make a succah. It is a mitzvah that can be done without cost so it is called an easy mitzvah. (I’m not quite sure how the Talmud would have responded to the price tag on today’s fancy, patented succos that come with options like buying a car.)

The Talmud continues and describes what happens: *“Each one will build a succah, and Hashem will shine the sun with such intense heat that they will leave the succah with disgust, kicking it as they leave.”*

The Talmud questions, “Aren’t they indeed absolved of the mitzvah if there is such intense heat?” It should be similar to the case of rainfall, which absolves a person of eating in the succah.

The Talmud replies that they are indeed absolved and may leave the succah. But they should not be kicking the succah as they do so.

The above Talmudic passage is fascinating, but with a bit of introspective review we can appreciate it on a deeper level.

The passage began that Hashem would assign them an “easy mitzvah” and suggested that it is easy because it doesn’t cost much. But by the time we complete the passage we can draw an even deeper conclusion as to why the mitzvah of succah assigned to these nations is an “easy mitzvah.” That is because they were never actually expected to do the mitzvah. In fact the entire endeavor to build the succah was merely needed to set the stage for the actual mitzvah assignment, which was: “To leave the succah with dignity.” Hashem made it so hot that they couldn’t do the mitzvah. That was His intent. The mitzvah was for them to accept the unexpected reassignment to a new task. The mitzvah was for them not to do the mitzvah that they thought they had to do. This is called an “easy mitzvah” because it doesn’t take much to do. All they need to do is to leave the succah they built... with dignity.

I once read a story of an 80-year old woman who was told (after a certain serious surgery) that she could not fast on Yom Kippur. Her initial response was, “I never ate on Yom Kippur and I won’t do it now. Even the Nazis couldn’t get me to eat on Yom Kippur.” But when her Rabbi found out he told her, “You must eat on Yom Kippur for your safety. It is a mitzvah. If you don’t agree I will have to come and feed you.” She ate. She told her family never to remind her of this Yom Kippur. It was so hard for her to accept the job reassignment that she had to eat on Yom Kippur. But she accepted it because she was working for G-d.

The concept of reassignment is actually quite common. Often we think the mitzvah that we are expected to do is one thing, when in actuality it is quite another.

A number of years ago when I was spending time in the hospital with my father-in-law z.l. he asked me to bring him some hot water for a tea. The problem was that the urn was located on a different floor, and so I insulated the cup as best as I could to keep it hot as I brought it from one floor to the next.

As I entered the elevator I was quite particular to keep away from people so that I would not get jostled and spill the water on anyone. Nevertheless, suddenly the elevator lurched, I lost my balance, and the cup of steaming hot water spilled all over my arm. It hurt enormously. But with fifteen pairs of eyes staring at my yarmulka, tzitzis, and steam generating shirt sleeve, I am eternally grateful that the only thing that emanated from my lips was the word, “Ouch!”

If you had asked me at the time what mitzvah I was involved in, I would have undoubtedly answered, "Getting a cup of hot water for a patient." But in reality I had apparently been assigned an entirely different mitzvah: Kiddush Hashem, thankfully responding to a disappointing and painful situation as someone trained in the yeshiva system should.

The concept of job reassignment applies to anyone who finds themselves in a situation that does not meet their plans or expectations. It applied to our father Avraham, who thought his mitzvah was to sacrifice his son, only to find out that that wasn't the real mitzvah at all. It applies to people who wish they could live elsewhere, but for whatever reason can't change things at the present time... even if the place they wish they would live is Eretz Yisroel. It applies to people forced into career changes, or changes in lifestyle due to lifecycle events. Sometimes people can plan a mitzvah only to find that it is a great mitzvah but at the wrong time. Accepting job reassignment, whether permanent or temporary, can be an "easy mitzvah" if one sees themselves as working for G-d. The motivation never was personal accolades or accumulation of reward. The motivation must be to serve G-d. Then even the toughest reassignment can be implemented with dignity.

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of over 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, or to help sponsor his Torah insights, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

From my archives

Sukkos: Torah -- A Personal Guide

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2022

The first time that the festivals are mentioned in the Torah, they are presented as seasonal holidays. In Parshas Mishpatim, shortly after we accepted the Torah on Har Sinai, we are commanded to celebrate three festivals for G-d each year. The first is the Festival of Matzos "*at time of the spring month,*" then the "*harvest festival at the ripening of your work*" and "*the harvest festival at the end of the year.*" (Shemos 23:15-16)

The Ramba"n explains that the festivals are times to express gratitude to G-d for the continual and reliable rules of nature. We stop and thank G-d at the renewal of spring, when we begin the new cycle. We stop and thank G-d in the middle of the cycle, as we begin harvesting. Then we take time again at the end of the cycle, when we gather in the harvest. At each point, we stop and reflect on G-d's ongoing gift of maintaining the rules of nature and thereby providing us with our sustenance and nourishment year after year.

The Ramba"n notes that when we stop and recognize that G-d is giving us the gift of nourishment, we can bring ourselves to a much greater level of awareness of G-d's love and care for us. When we are recognizing that G-d is the Creator and Master of the world, then we can see ourselves as His subjects, living in His world. From this perspective, the gift of nourishment and sustenance is not simply one individual helping another in need. Rather, it is the commitment of the Master to care for His subjects. The rules of nature which G-d established and maintains, the yearly seasons and harvest, is G-d's commitment to nourish and sustain us.

The next verse speaks of the mitzvah of Pilgrimage, the obligation to travel to the Beis Hamkidash, the Temple, on each festival to "*appear before the Master, Hashem.*" (Shemos 23:17) The Ramba"n explains that when a servant is given all his needs from a master, the servant will express his gratitude by appearing before the master to receive their instructions. When we recognize the depth of G-d's commitment to us as His subjects, it behooves us to come forward and appear before Him to hear what He wishes of us. This is the Pilgrimage mitzva -- to come to learn what G-d asks of us, as an expression of our gratitude for our sustenance.

This Ramba"n is rather puzzling. The servant has not yet been given his instructions, and therefore comes to his master to find out what he should do. We, on the other hand, were given our instructions long ago on Har Sinai. We received the

Torah long before the festival occurs. Why do we need to go to find out what we should do to serve G-d? Rather than a pilgrimage, shouldn't we simply spend the day studying Torah?

Perhaps, this Rambam is teaching us the proper way to approach Torah study. Deepening my awareness and recognition of G-d is more than simply an inspiration to study and keep the Torah. When I see G-d in my life, then I recognize that Torah is a personal directive from G-d for my life. When I study Torah from this perspective, it opens my mind and inspires me to find insights and messages which are relevant for my life. Our rabbis teach us that the Beis Hamikdash had a unique holiness whereby a person was more capable of recognizing G-d's Presence in the world. The Pilgrimage Mitzvah is to appear before G-d so that we will be in a place where we can more deeply recognize and sense G-d's greatness. Only then can we truly hear the directives which G-d intends for each of us in our own lives.

While we don't have the Beis Hamikdash today, we still have the holidays and the many opportunities for inspiration that they provide -- the Sukkah representing the yearly harvest and the clouds of glory; the Four Species representing our closeness with G-d, the unity of the Jewish people, and so much more. Inspired by the holiday, we must also reflect on the unique personal blessings in our lives. The more we see G-d in our lives, the more we can understand that G-d has a personal interest in each of us. Then, we can begin to approach Torah properly as a personal directive for each of our lives, and find the messages meant for us today.

From my archives.

* Rav at Sha'arei Tefilla and the co-founder of the RI Torah Network in Providence, Rhode Island. For several years, Rabbi Singer was the Rabbi at Am HaTorah Congregation in Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer's recent Devrei Torah normally come as podcasts rather than texts.

Yonah – Jonah, Wake Up!

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia * (2014)

[I do not have a new Dvar Torah from Rabbi Ovadia for Sukkot.]

Faithful to Sephardic tradition, we have started Selichot this week (Ki Tetze), not because we are more sinful than other contingencies, but because we love the atmosphere of Selichot at early dawn, permeated with soulfulness and longing. The Selichot appropriately open with the poem:

Son of man, how dare you sleep, wake up and pray with supplication.

This line makes direct reference to the famous biblical narrative of Jonah which we will read at Mincha of Yom Kippur, thus completing a full circle from the beginning to the end of the High Holidays period.

The story of Jonah is the story of the decline and fall of the human being, which occurs when we refuse to face our fears, our anger and our problems. Jonah runs away from God and in the process keeps descending lower and lower: he goes down to Jaffa and boards a ship (lit. goes down on the ship), goes down to the stern, and sinks in deep sleep. He is sound asleep amidst a terrible storm which could claim his life along with all the others on board when the captain approaches him and shakes him: *"how dare you sleep? Rise and call out to your God!"*

Many of the tragedies and hardships which befall us are a result of a Jonahesque behavior. When we allow ourselves to give up, to cease trying, to become indifferent and apathetic because we think that nothing is going to change, we seal our fate together with that of many others.

Globally, this proclivity to inaction is well demonstrated by the oblivious and carefree approach to the destruction the human race is wreaking on the planet. Decades of spilling pollutants into our waterways, sinking chemicals into the ground and

releasing poisonous and harmful gasses to the air have placed us at the eye of a terrible ecological storm, but most governments and individuals are still sleeping, cuddling in their little patch of heaven.

Nationally, we see now a replay of the horrific events which led to 9/11, when the U.S. chose to ignore a series of attacks, signaling the terrorists that it is tired of monitoring its facilities or enforcing security measures. The lack of proper response to the attempt at the Twin Towers in 1993, the bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and the USS Cole in 2000, emboldened Al Qaida and encouraged it to carry out attacks on a much larger scale, which left the U.S. devastated and embroiled in a decade long military quagmire.

The same chilling scenario is playing out now as the U.S. and European powers choose to ignore the true danger of extremists and nationalists around the world, focusing instead on Israel in the hope that if the great nations will kneel before the altar of terrorism and will sacrifice on it this tiny state, the aircraft carrier of the Middle East, the blood thirsty leaders will be appeased and those nations will be able to go back to their ignorantly blissful slumber. The shortsighted leaders of those nations refuse to acknowledge that millions of refugees in Africa, hundreds of kidnapped girls in Nigeria, hundreds of thousands murdered and displaced in Syria and who knows how many tortured by ISIS, are all, in one way or another, a result of the indifference and apathy of world powers.

Inaction and submissiveness to difficult reality lead to exacerbation of the situation as we can see in the Parasha of this week, Ki Tetze. Ignoring a child's emotional needs might turn him into a criminal (Det. 21:15-23); A strong warning against ignoring a neighbor's potential loss (22:1-4); Negligence to take safety measures results in tragedy (22:8); The apathy of the Ammonites and Moabites toward the plight of the Israelites caused their alienation from them, and as we know now, their disappearance from the stage of world history (23:1-7).

But let us return to the Selichot and to the state of the individual. The Torah goads the human being towards Tikkun Olam, the improvement and perfection of life on earth, and that lofty goal can only be achieved by the combined power of determined, dedicated and most importantly, alert, individuals.

The Selichot are a pressing call for inspection and evaluation. The opening verse, drawing on the story of Jonah, asks us directly: Are you awake? Do you know what is going on around you? And as we sail through the Selichot, we can add many more questions:

Who are my kids' friends? How am I treated by or treating my spouse? When will this day be over? When will the prayers be over? If I had a chance to do things over, would I change anything? What have I learned last year, week, or day? How did I apply this knowledge to my life? What am I doing to make this world a better place? Do the people I interact with on a daily basis love, respect, revere, or detest me? Am I sleeping, and if so, when I am going to wake up? Did I set up the alarm clock? Is this a nightmare?

Let us all rise and shine, take to mind, take to heart and take action.

Shabbat Shalom.

Many Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.

Note: Rabbi Ovadia posted this Dvar Torah for Ki Tetze in 2014, but it fits perfectly for Mincha on Yom Kippur.

* Senior Rabbi, Congregation Ramath Orah (New York, NY); Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Previously, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD). Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:** <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>. The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats. Rabbi Ovadia retains all rights (copyright) to this and all other Devrei Torah that he permits me to share.

A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz *

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation **

What an incredible way to begin the new year!

We had such a beautiful Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, with wonderful energy, great attendance, and such a strong sense of community. It was really special to share these High Holidays with all of you.

And now, we go straight into Sukkot!

There is something so beautiful about the timing of Sukkot. After Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, after reflecting, reconnecting, and starting the year fresh, we immediately move into a holiday of joy, celebration, and being together.

And we are going to make the most of it!

We have back-to-back events throughout Sukkot, leading us all the way into Simchat Torah. There is something for everyone, so I really encourage everyone to look through the Shavua and find an event or two, or more! that you can come and be a part of.

Bring your family, bring your friends, come for an event, come for a meal, come for the atmosphere but most importantly, come and be part of our community.

Let's celebrate Sukkot together, enjoy this beautiful time of year, and start the new year with lots of joy, energy, and togetherness!

Wishing everyone a Chag Sameach and a wonderful Sukkot!

Rabbi Netanel

* Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is now Rabbi of the ACT Jewish Community in Canberra, the capitol city of Australia. I hope to be able to include his Torah insights soon.

** Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: <https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobisher> .

Rav Kook Torah Succoth: All of Israel in One Sukkah

The Talmud in Sukkah 27b makes a remarkable claim regarding the holiday of Succoth:

For seven days... all who belong to the people of Israel will live in sukkot [thatched huts] (Lev. 23:42)

This teaches that it is fitting for all of Israel to sit in one sukkah.

Obviously, no sukkah is large enough to hold the entire Jewish people. What is the meaning of this utopian vision — all of Israel sitting together in a single sukkah?

The Unity of Succoth

As long as we are plagued by pettiness and other character flaws, we cannot attain true collective unity. But after experiencing the unique holiness of Yom Kippur, this unfortunate state is repaired. After our lives have been illuminated by the light of teshuvah and the entire Jewish nation has been purified from the negative influences of sin and moral weakness, the soul's inner purity becomes our predominant quality. With this regained integrity, we merit an ever-increasing harmony among the diverse sectors of the nation.

During the holiday of Succoth we absorb the light of Torah and a love for truth. Conflicting views become integrated and unified. Through the spiritual ascent of the Days of Awe, we attain a comprehensive unity, a unity that extends its holy light over all parts of the Jewish people. During this special time, it is as if the entire nation is sitting together, sharing the holy experience of the same sukkah.

According to the Hasidic master Rabbi Nathan (1780-1844, chief disciple and scribe of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov), this sense of unity is the very essence of the mitzvah of sukkah. He wrote in *Likutei Halachot* that one should fulfill the mitzvah of sukkah with the following kavanah:

One should concentrate on being part of the entire people of Israel, with intense love and peace, until it may be considered as if all of Israel dwells together in one sukkah.

(Silver from the Land of Israel. Adapted from *Mo'adei HaRe'iyah* p. 96.)

https://ravkooktorah.org/sukkot_67

Succot: The Festival of Insecurity (September 13, 2013)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

What exactly is a succah? What is it supposed to represent?

The question is essential to the mitzvah itself. The Torah says:

"Live in succot for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in succot so that your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in succot when I brought them out of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." Lev. 23:42-43

In other words, knowing – reflecting, understanding, being aware – is an integral part of the mitzvah. For that reason, says Rabbah in the Talmud (Succah 2a), a succah that is taller than twenty cubits (about thirty feet or nine metres high) is invalid because when the sechach, the "roof," is that far above your head, you are unaware of it.

So what is a succah? On this, two Mishnaic Sages disagreed. Rabbi Eliezer held that the succah represents the Clouds of Glory that surrounded the Israelites during the wilderness years, protecting them from heat during the day, cold during the night, and bathing them with the radiance of the Divine Presence. This view is reflected in a number of the Targumim. Rashi in his commentary takes it as the "plain sense" of the verse. Rabbi Akiva on the other hand says succot mammash, meaning a succah is a succah, no more and no less: a hut, a booth, a temporary dwelling. It has no symbolism. It is what it is (Succah 11b).

The festival of Succot, according to Rashbam, exists to remind us of our humble origins so that we never fall into the complacency of taking freedom, the land of Israel and the blessings it yields, for granted, thinking that it happened in the normal course of history.

However there is another way of understanding Rabbi Akiva, and it lies in one of the most important lines in the prophetic literature. Jeremiah says, in words we recited on Rosh Hashanah, *“I remember the loving-kindness of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown”* (Jer. 2:2). This is one of the very rare lines in Tanach that speaks in praise not of God but of the people Israel.

“How odd of God / to choose the Jews,” goes the famous rhyme, to which the answer is: “Not quite so odd: the Jews chose God.” They may have been, at times, fractious, rebellious, ungrateful and wayward. But they had the courage to travel, to move, to leave security behind, and follow God’s call, as did Abraham and Sarah at the dawn of our history. If the succah represents God’s Clouds of Glory, where was “the loving-kindness of your youth”? There is no sacrifice involved if God is visibly protecting you in every way and at all times. But if we follow Rabbi Akiva and see the succah as what it is, the temporary home of a temporarily homeless people, then it makes sense to say that Israel showed the courage of a bride willing to follow her husband on a risk-laden journey to a place she has never seen before – a love that shows itself in the fact that she is willing to live in a hut trusting her husband’s promise that one day they will have a permanent home.

If so, then a wonderful symmetry discloses itself in the three pilgrimage festivals. Pesach represents the love of God for His people. Succot represents the love of the people for God. Shavuot represents the mutuality of love expressed in the covenant at Sinai in which God pledged Himself to the people, and the people to God. (For a similar conclusion, reached by a slightly different route, see R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, Meshech Chochmah to Deut. 5:15. I am grateful to David Frei of the London Beth Din for this reference.)

Succot, on this reading, becomes a metaphor for the Jewish condition not only during the forty years in the desert but also the almost 2,000 years spent in exile and dispersion. For centuries Jews lived, not knowing whether the place in which they lived would prove to be a mere temporary dwelling. To take just one period as an example: Jews were expelled from England in 1290, and during the next two centuries from almost every country in Europe, culminating in the Spanish Expulsion in 1492, and the Portuguese in 1497. They lived in a state of permanent insecurity. **Succot is the festival of insecurity.** [emphasis added]

What is truly remarkable is that it is called, by tradition, *zeman simchatenu*, “our time of joy.” That to me is the wonder at the heart of the Jewish experience: that Jews throughout the ages were able to experience risk and uncertainty at every level of their existence and yet – while they sat betzila de-mehemnuta, “under the shadow of faith” (this is the Zohar’s description of the succah: Zohar, Emor, 103a) – they were able to rejoice. That is spiritual courage of a high order. **I have often argued that faith is not certainty: faith is the courage to live with uncertainty.** That is what Succot represents if what we celebrate is succot mamash, not the Clouds of Glory but the vulnerability of actual huts, open to the wind, the rain and the cold. [emphasis added]

I find that faith today in the people and the State of Israel. It is astonishing to me how Israelis have been able to live with an almost constant threat of war and terror since the State was born, and not give way to fear. I sense even in the most secular Israelis a profound faith, not perhaps “religious” in the conventional sense, but faith nonetheless: in life, and the future, and hope. Israelis seem to me perfectly to exemplify what tradition says was God’s reply to Moses when he doubted the people’s capacity to believe: “They are believers, the children of believers” (Shabbat 97a). Today’s Israel is a living embodiment of what it is to exist in a state of insecurity and still rejoice.

And that is Succot’s message to the world. **Succot is the only festival about which Tanach says that it will one day be celebrated by the whole world** (Zechariah 14:16-19). The twenty-first century is teaching us what this might mean. For most of history, most people have experienced a universe that did not change fundamentally in their lifetimes. But there have been rare great ages of transition: the birth of agriculture, the first cities, the dawn of civilisation, the invention of printing, and the industrial revolution. These were destabilising times, and they brought disruption in their wake. The age of transition we have experienced in our lifetime, born primarily out of the invention of the computer and instantaneous global

communication, will one day be seen as the greatest and most rapid era of change since Homo sapiens first set foot on earth.

Since 9/11, we have experienced the convulsions. As I write these words, some nations are tearing themselves apart, and no nation is free of the threat of terror. There are parts of the Middle East and beyond that recall Hobbes' famous description of the "state of nature," a "war of every man against every man" in which there is "continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short" (Hobbes, *The Leviathan*, chapter XI). Insecurity begets fear, fear begets hate, hate begets violence, and violence eventually turns against its perpetrators. The twenty-first century will one day be seen by historians as the Age of Insecurity. We, as Jews, are the world's experts in insecurity, having lived with it for millennia. And the supreme response to insecurity is Succot, when we leave behind the safety of our houses and sit in succot mammash, in huts exposed to the elements. To be able to do so and still say, this is zeman simchatenu, our festival of joy, is the supreme achievement of faith, the ultimate antidote to fear.

Faith is the ability to rejoice in the midst of instability and change, travelling through the wilderness of time toward an unknown destination. Faith is not fear. Faith is not hate. Faith is not violence. These are vital truths, never more needed than now.

<https://rabbisacks.org/archive/festival-insecurity-message-succot/>. There are no saved footnotes for this essay.

The Multiculturalism Debate

By Naftali Silberberg *

An ongoing debate in many Western societies today revolves around the value of multiculturalism versus the importance of assimilating the various groups and segments which constitute a society into a homogeneous entity. As is the case with the majority of widely debated issues, both sides of this particular polemic bring valid points and convincing arguments to the discussion table.

On one hand, a society is enriched by diversity and exposure to a variety of cultures, languages and value systems. Coercing elements of society to conform to a particular mold — no matter how splendid that mold may be — is an attempt to stifle the soul of that element, and anathema to a culture that prides itself in allowing freedom of expression. As Kabbalah teaches, true beauty results from the harmonization of diverse colors and flavors.

On the other hand, the smooth functionality of a nation depends largely on a united population that feels a strong kinship with one another.

We, too, struggle with the issue of forging a multicultural population into a singular Jewish nation. Diverse segments of a population which are constantly competing with each other make for an unhealthy society. Globally, much violence and strife, and many civil wars, result from tensions between co-citizens of rivaling religions, values or ethnicities. Thus, the acculturation of a nation's citizens might sound harsh and nationalistic, but is actually the key to a unified society, and ultimately a stable one.

The Jewish nation is also demographically diverse: Ashkenazim, Sephardim, chassidim, observant, not-so-observant, scholars, laymen, men, women, etc. We, too, struggle with the issue of forging a multicultural population into a singular nation. Sociologists attempting to resolve the "melting pot issue" would perhaps be well-advised to examine the Torah's perspective on e pluribus unum.

We are now ushering in the holiday of Sukkot. **The two primary mitzvot of this holiday are dwelling in the sukkah and the taking of the Four Kinds. Jewish unity is one of the primary themes of this holiday, and these two mitzvot are symbolic of two approaches to Jewish unity; the sukkah champions the cause of Jewish nationalism and focuses on our nation as a homogeneous unit, while the Four Kinds symbolize the importance of "Jewish multiculturalism."** [emphasis added]

We sit in a sukkah in commemoration of the clouds of glory which miraculously encircled the Jewish people while they traveled in the desert. The clouds did not differentiate between one Jew and another — all were equal beneficiaries of their shade and protection. We, too, sit together in a sukkah as a symbol of our unity. We focus on that which unites us — our common values, mission, and souls—rather than that which divides us. We leave behind our differences and unite behind one flag.

The Four Kinds, however, tell a different story. **According to the Midrash, the four different species represent different sorts of Jews, spanning the spectrum from the most observant and scholarly to the simplest of our people.**

Nevertheless we take the Four Kinds and hold them together, because we are one people despite the differences. But as opposed to the sukkah, this mitzvah doesn't attempt to achieve unity by ignoring our differences; rather it points out the differences, embraces them and secures our unity in spite of them. [emphasis added]

This is because unity achieved at the expense of disregarding our unique personalities and strengths is a flawed unity. Unity achieved at the expense of disregarding our unique personalities and strengths is a flawed unity. It means that the unity is very limited, limited to our shared goals and souls. Our daily lives which are so colored by our unique personalities remain unaffected by the sukkah-style unity.

But without the type of unity advocated by the sukkah, the multicultural approach of the Four Kinds would not succeed. For without an underlying unifying factor, diverse people have nothing to rally around. The Four Kinds is an endeavor to build on the unity of the sukkah by injecting our individual personalities with our pervading unity; by devoting our assorted strengths, talents and natures to perpetuating the ideals that unite us; by recognizing that the different pieces of the puzzle may look dissimilar, but are all there to complete one picture.

* Rabbi Silberberg resides in Brooklyn, New York, with his wife, Chaya Mushka, and their three children.

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2717016/jewish/The-Multiculturalism-Debate.htm

Sukkot: Rising Above the Physical World

By Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky *

"You shall live in huts (sukot) throughout this seven-day period." (Leviticus 23:42)

The sukah is unique among the Torah's commandments in that it is the only one that we physically enter; the sukah surrounds us on all sides. This property of the sukah is a physical manifestation of the Divine energy that the sukah embodies: the awareness that G d exists apart from the world and beyond its limitations.

We are taught that spiritually, the sukah derives from the cloud produced when the high priest would burn incense in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur. Whereas the animal sacrifices focused primarily on refining our human/animal soul, the incense expressed the inner consciousness of our Divine soul. Our Divine soul operates on a higher plane than that of our normal, human/animal consciousness. The Divine soul enables us to transcend the limits imposed on our lives by our human/animal soul, whose intellect and emotions are focused solely on physical things.

Thus, our task on the holiday of Sukot is firstly to focus on G d's unlimited Divinity by building the sukah, and secondly, to internalize our awareness of this Divinity both by dwelling in the sukah and by fulfilling the commandment of holding and waving the four plant-parts.

– From *Daily Wisdom* 1 *

* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom* by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky.

With wishes for a sweet and blessed new year.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Sukkot For Our Time

Of all the festivals, Sukkot is surely the one that speaks most powerfully to our time. Kohelet could almost have been written in the twenty-first century. Here is the picture of ultimate success, the man who has it all – the houses, the cars, the clothes, the adoring women, the envy of others – he has pursued everything this world can offer from pleasure to possessions to power to wisdom and yet, surveying the totality of his life, he can only say, in effect, "Meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless."

Kohelet's failure to find meaning is directly related to his obsession with the "I" and the "Me": "I built for myself. I gathered for myself. I acquired for myself." The more he pursues his desires, the emptier his life becomes. There is no more powerful critique of the consumer society, whose idol is the self, whose icon is the "selfie" and whose moral code is "Whatever works for you." This is the society that achieved unprecedented affluence, giving people more choices than they have ever known, and yet at same time saw an unprecedented rise in alcohol and drug abuse, eating disorders, stress-related syndromes, depression, attempted suicide and actual suicide. A society of tourists, not pilgrims, is not one that will yield the sense of a life worth living. Of all things people have chosen to worship, the self is the least fulfilling. A culture of narcissism quickly gives way to loneliness and despair.

Kohelet was also, of course, a cosmopolitan: a man at home everywhere and therefore nowhere. This is the man who had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines but in the end could only say, "More bitter than death is the woman." It should be clear to anyone who reads this in the context of the life of King Solomon, the author of the book, that Kohelet is not really talking about women but about himself.

In the end Kohelet finds meaning in simple things. "Sweet is the sleep of a labouring man." "Enjoy life with the woman you love." "Eat, drink and enjoy the sun." That, ultimately, is the meaning of Sukkot as a whole. It is a festival of simple things. It is, Jewishly, the time we come closer to nature than any other, sitting in a hut with only leaves for a roof, and taking in our hands the

unprocessed fruits and foliage of the palm branch, the citron, twigs of myrtle and leaves of willow. It is a time when we briefly liberate ourselves from the sophisticated pleasures of the city and the processed artefacts of a technological age, where we take time to recapture some of the innocence we had when we were young, when the world still had the radiance of wonder.

The power of Sukkot is that it takes us back to the most elemental roots of our being. You don't need to live in a palace to be surrounded by Clouds of Glory. You don't need to be gloriously wealthy to buy yourself the same leaves and fruit that a billionaire uses in worshipping God. Living in the succah and inviting guests to your meal, you discover that the people who have come to visit you are none other than Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their wives (such is the premise of Ushpizin, the mystical guests). What makes a hut more beautiful than a home is that when it comes to Sukkot there is no difference between the richest of the rich and the poorest of the poor. We are all strangers on earth, temporary residents in God's almost eternal universe. And whether or not we are capable of pleasure, whether or not we have found happiness, nonetheless we can all feel joy.

Sukkot is the time we ask the most profound question of what makes a life worth living. Having prayed on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to be written in the Book of Life, Kohelet forces us to remember how brief life actually is, and how vulnerable. "Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." What matters is not how long we live, but how intensely we feel that life is a gift we repay by giving to others. Joy, the overwhelming theme of the festival, is what we feel when we know that it is a privilege simply to be alive, inhaling the intoxicating beauty of this moment amidst the profusion of nature, the teeming diversity of life and the sense of communion with those many others who share our history and our hope.

Most majestically of all, Sukkot is the festival of insecurity. It is the candid acknowledgment that there is no life without risk, yet we can face the future without fear when we know we are not alone. God is with us, in the rain that brings blessings to the earth, in the love that brought the universe and us into being, and in the resilience of spirit that allowed a small and vulnerable people to outlive the greatest

empires the world has ever known. Sukkot reminds us that God's glory was present in the small, portable Tabernacle Moses and the Israelites built in the desert even more emphatically than in Solomon's Temple with all its grandeur. A Temple can be destroyed. But a succah, even if broken, can be rebuilt tomorrow. Security is not something we can achieve physically but it is something we can acquire mentally, psychologically, spiritually. All it needs is the courage and willingness to sit under the shadow of God's sheltering wings. *[Extracted from the Koren Sacks Sukkot Machzor]*

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

This magnificent three-week festival period – Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot – may be viewed and experienced in two dimensions simultaneously; the universalist, nationalist dimension, and the particularistic, individual/family dimension. Rosh Hashanah is the day on which the world was born, when the sigh-sob t'ruah sound of the shofar cries out against the tragedies and injustices of an imperfect world and the sharp, joyous t'kiyah sound reminds us of our responsibility – and ability – to help perfect the world in the Kingship of God by conveying the moral message of ethical monotheism; a God who demands justice, compassion and peace.

On Yom Kippur, the Almighty declares His readiness to forgive the nation Israel of its great sins – the idolatrous golden calf, the faithless cowardice of the scouts with the vision of our Holy Temple reaching out to all of humanity, "For My house is a House of Prayer for all nations" (Isaiah 56:7).

Sukkot is the climax of the season, taking us out of our egocentric, partisan lives and ordaining that we surround ourselves with fruits of the Land of Israel living beneath a roof of vegetation through whose spaces we look up at the stars. Seventy bullocks were sacrificed in the Holy Temple during the Sukkot Festival, symbolizing the seventy nations of the world.

And finally, Shemini Atzeret announces the onset of the rainy season: rain is, after all, a gift of God to the world.

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Shemini Atzeret moves into the uninhibited joy of Simkhat Torah – the Rejoicing of the Torah, when all Torah Scrolls are taken out of the Holy Ark and become the focus of frenzied dancing not only in the synagogues but also outside in the streets – the public domain – in order to imbue the world with its message of “Thou shalt not murder” and “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

However, Judaism understands only too well that one dare not focus on humanity without concentrating on individuals. One cannot be a concerned universalist without hearing the cries of one’s next door neighbor. Yes, it is the Jewish mission to convey the message of ethical monotheism to a world. The people of the covenant must perfect the world in the Kingship of our God of justice, compassion and peace. But first we must perfect ourselves: not only our nation, but our community; not only our community but our family; and not only our family but ourselves.

A disciple once approached Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (1800-1870), founder of the Ethicist (Mussar) Movement in Judaism, seeking permission to spread the ethical and moral message of the Master to Germany and Austria. The rabbi responded: “And is the City of Salant so imbued with my teachings that you can afford to leave Lithuania? And is the street on which you live so morally inspired that you can teach in another community? And is your own family so careful in their conduct that you can preach to other families? And what about you, my beloved disciple? Are you on such a high level of ethical integrity that no one could criticize you?”

And so, Rosh Hashanah ushers in a ten-day period of repentance and introspection when we must be mindful of the need to perfect the world, but we must first attempt to perfect ourselves. Rosh Hashanah is the day on which the world was born, but it is also the “Day of Judgment,” when everyone passes before the Almighty to be evaluated and judged, when each of us must evaluate and judge ourselves from the perspective of Divine standards.

Yom Kippur may be a historic and national day of forgiveness, a day on which we invoke our Holy Temple as a “House of Prayer for all nations,” but it is first and foremost a day in which the individual stands in isolation from the world in the presence of the Divine. No food, no drink, no sexual relationship – with almost the entire day to be spent in God’s house. Each of us rids ourselves of all materialistic encumbrances, separates ourselves from physical needs and blandishments, enters a no-man’s land between heaven and earth, between life and death, dons the non-leather shoes worn by the mourner,

and in effect feels what it’s like to mourn for oneself by asking what legacy would I leave, were I to be taken from the world today?

And then comes Sukkot. Leave your fancy surroundings for a week; go back to basics. Spend seven days with your family in a simple hut. Remember that “when familial love is strong, a couple can sleep on the edge of a sword; but when familial love has gone sour, a bed of sixty miles does not provide sufficient room” (B.T. Sanhedrin 7a). Forget Netflix and Facebook; bring the special guests of the Bible into your simple but significant space, commune with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph and David, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Lea, Miriam, Deborah and Ruth. Introduce them to your children – rather than today’s pop stars and Instagram influencers – and sing and speak and share together. Remember – and communicate – that what is important is values not venues, content not coverings, inner emotions and not external appearances. And let the sukkah lead you to Simkhat Torah, to the love and joy of Torah, which will help form the kind of individuals and families who can build communities and, ultimately, change the world.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Festival of Sukkot: What Is True Joy? Rabbi Oriel Zaretsky

What is true joy? The Rebbe of Bobov once said, “When Rosh Hashanah arrives, I know with absolute clarity that this is the holiest and loftiest of days. Can anything be compared to the piercing cry of the shofar? Yet when Yom Kippur comes, it becomes clear to me that this is the holiest of days. What could possibly compare with the prayers of Kol Nidrei and Ne’ilah, or with the fervent proclamation at the close of the fast: ‘The Lord, He is God!’? And then, when Sukkot arrives, once again I feel certain that this is the most exalted of all festivals. For what can rival the experience of sitting in the Sukkah, dwelling beneath the ‘shade of faith’ (b’tzila d’meheimanuta), as if seated in the very presence of God Himself?”

The Rebbe of Bobov continues in this vein, but let us pause and dwell on the festival of Sukkot itself, and reflect upon what gives it its unique and exalted character.

What makes Sukkot so distinctive?

To begin answering this question, it is instructive to consider the precise language used by our Sages when they formulated the prayers for the festivals. In those carefully chosen words, they encapsulated the essence of each occasion: Shavuot is described as zman matan toratenu “–the time of the giving of our Torah.” Pesach is zman cheiruteinu – “the time of our freedom.” But Sukkot alone is

designated zman simchateinu “–the time of our joy.”

Why, then, is joy singled out and linked especially to Sukkot? After all, the obligation of offering the shalmei simchah – the festive peace-offerings brought in the Temple in Jerusalem to fulfill the commandment of rejoicing – was not unique to Sukkot but applied equally to all the pilgrimage festivals.

The answer lies in the wording of the Torah itself. Regarding Pesach, the Torah does not mention joy at all. With Shavuot, joy is mentioned only once. But when it speaks of Sukkot, joy is mentioned three separate times. It is for this reason that Sukkot is uniquely known as zman simchateinu.

What, then, is the joy that the Torah commands?

I would like to suggest three layers of explanation – each one deepening, refining, and elevating our understanding of true joy.

First explanation: the joy of fulfilling a mitzvah.

Kohelet, the book we read on Shabbat Chol HaMoed Sukkot, grapples directly with this tension. On the one hand, King Shlomo declares: “Of joy [I said], ‘What does it accomplish?’” (Kohelet 2:2). Yet later, he affirms: “Then I commended joy” (Kohelet 8:15).

Our Sages (Tractate of Shabbat 30b) resolve this tension by teaching that true joy is spiritual in nature: the joy of fulfilling a mitzvah. We rejoice when we perform God’s commandments and walk in the ways of the Torah. This is genuine joy—just as we celebrate Shabbat with festive meals, song, and words of Torah. Joy that derives solely from material pleasures, with no spiritual core, is not authentic joy.

The Rambam underscores this at the end of Hilchot Lulav: “The joy with which a person rejoices in fulfilling the commandments and in the love of God who commanded them is itself a form of great service [of God]. Whoever holds himself back from such joy is deserving of punishment, as it is said: ‘Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and with gladness of heart’ (Devarim 28:47). Thus, too, with David, King of Israel, who declared: ‘And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight’ (Shmuel II 6:22). For there is no greatness and honor other than rejoicing before God.”

Second explanation: joy must not remain confined to the self but must flow outward to others.

The Rambam warns that even the joy of performing mitzvot can become problematic if it remains entirely self-centered. To rejoice only for oneself, without giving thought to others, is to miss the essence of sacred joy. On this point, the Rambam writes (Hilchot Megillah 2:17):

"It is better for a person to give generously to the poor than to expand his feast or multiply gifts to his friends. For there is no greater and more splendid joy than to gladden the hearts of the poor, the orphans, the widows, and the strangers. One who brings joy to the downtrodden is likened to the Divine Presence itself, as it is said: 'To revive the spirit of the humble, and to revitalize the heart of the contrite ones' (Yeshayahu 57:15)."

Third explanation: complete joy arises only through the unity of the entire people of Israel.

Even after one has extended his joy to the poor, the orphan, and the widow, the Torah teaches that joy remains incomplete if it does not embrace the entire nation. Joy is only whole when no one is excluded, when the people of Israel are bound together as one.

This is the message of the Arba'a Minim—the four species: Lulav, Etrog, Hadass, and Aravah. Bound together, they symbolize all types of Jews: those who study Torah but do not perform mitzvot, those who perform mitzvot but do not study Torah, and even those who do neither. Only when all four are united can the mitzvah be fulfilled. If even one is absent, the mitzvah cannot be performed. Similarly, our national joy remains partial if even one Jew is left outside the circle.

When we stand united, only then can we rejoice fully—and only then does God forgive our sins. This is the very lesson encountered only a few days earlier, on Yom Kippur, in the opening words of Kol Nidrei: "With the consent of the Heavenly court and with the consent of the earthly court, we permit prayer with transgressors."

All of us together.

And it is only once we have reached this level of unity and true joy that we merit to hear the words of the bat kol, the Heavenly voice, that resounds after Yom Kippur:

"Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted thy deeds" (Kohelet 9:7).

On a personal note: I found deep joy in the halachic learning at the Straus-Amiel Emissary Training Institute. There we engaged with halachic challenges faced by Jewish

communities across the globe – dilemmas rarely encountered in Israel.

Even during my shlichut, the guidance I had received from Rabbi Eliahu Birnbaum and Rabbi Yehoshua Grunstein was of immense value.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

Fruit and the Flower

By Rav Yair Kahn

"Be not seduced by Greek wisdom, which yields only flowers but no fruit." - R. Yehuda Halevi

When we study the halakhic aspects of the arba minim, the four species taken on Sukkot, our curiosity is aroused regarding their meta-halakhic significance as well. One ponders the spiritual significance of the mitzva of lulav and questions the symbolism of the chosen species. To be sure, Chazal offer innovative and profound insights regarding this question on the level of derash (creative homiletics), apparently assuming that the simple peshat (literal meaning) was relatively obvious. This compels us to explore the straightforward symbolism embodied in the Torah's selection of these specific species.

The Torah refers to Sukkot as the harvest season when it introduces the mitzva of lulav. At the time produce is harvested from the fields, we are commanded to take the four species and rejoice with them before God. It would appear that the purpose of the mitzva of lulav is to translate the joy of the harvest into a religious experience, which combines praise with prayer. Therefore, the Torah demanded that we take four different types of plants, each of which is connected to the idea of harvest, and express through them our resultant gratitude and petitions. Based on this interpretation, peshat would dictate explaining the four species within an agricultural context, and the mitzva associated with the religious feelings expressed at a harvest.

When considering the mitzva of lulav from this perspective, we may offer a suggestion regarding the significance of the four species. The lulav, which grows on top of the palm tree, symbolizes the majesty and grandeur found in flora. Even when removed from the tree, the lulav is the tallest of the species and, according to many Rishonim, must actually be placed higher than the rest. It is due to this dominance that Chazal instituted that the blessing should single out the lulav - "al netilat lulav."

The etrog is not mentioned explicitly in the Torah. Instead, we find a reference to "peri etz hadar," the fruit of a beautiful tree. This singular terminology focuses our attention upon the unique element of the etrog: it is a

"peri," fruit, and therefore representative of agricultural produce.

Similarly, there is no explicit Biblical reference to hadasim. Instead, the term "anaf etz avot" (branch of a thick-leaved tree) is employed, which describes the characteristics of the hadas rather than identifying it as a species. From this phrase, our sages derived that the leaves must envelop the branch of the hadas, and, according to many opinions, the hadas is actually defined by these characteristics. Accordingly, when considering the hadas, our attention is focused upon the richness of the foliage and the wealth and abundance found in nature. (See R. Mosheh Lichtenstein's article on hadas in Alon Shevut #158.)

Arava as a species is specified in the Torah, which makes reference to "arvei nachal," willows of the stream. Many opinions take this literally and require aravot that actually grew alongside a stream. Even those opinions that forgo this stipulation, nevertheless admit that aravot are of a species that normally grows alongside a stream. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that aravot represent water, which is the source of all agricultural life. In fact, we find that aravot are taken independently on Hoshana Rabbah, a day whose liturgy revolves around water.

Accordingly, the four species relate to different aspects of the botanical world. They combine in a comprehensive manner, in order to generate the appropriate religious response. The source, the majesty, the overflowing abundance and the produce are all represented. However, there seems to be one botanical aspect that was ignored, one field of agriculture that was omitted. The flower is not represented. Why is the beauty found in nature overlooked?

Before tackling this problem, let us take a quick glance at one verse in Sefer Bereishit:

"And the Lord God caused to grow from the ground every tree that was pleasing to behold (nechmad le-mareh) and good for consumption." (2:9)

While the Torah describes the trees of the Garden of Eden as aesthetically pleasing and edible or nutritious, Chava viewed the Tree of Knowledge as "good for consumption and a delight to the eyes (ta'ava hu la-einayim)" (3:6). Close inspection reveals two critical differences between Chava's description and that of the Torah. Chava didn't refer to the tree as a pleasant sight, but rather as a beautiful object that arouses passion. Secondly, the Torah mentions the aesthetic element first, while Chava inverted the order.

The shift of order indicates a variant perspective on the role and purpose of beauty. Chava considered the aesthetic as an independent objective. The Torah, on the other hand, ascribed auxiliary status to the beauty of the tree, the pleasing vision being secondary to its primary element and objective, the fruit.

Man is fascinated by the aesthetic. He becomes captivated by beauty. When that which is pleasant becomes an object of passion, man's fancy turns to obsession and his lust leads to sin. The Torah accepted the legitimacy of the aesthetic, But not as an independent goal. Beauty can serve as a stimulant capable of motivating human creativity. The experience of beauty is productive insofar as it inspires spirituality.

We can now attempt to explain why the flower, representing beauty, is omitted from the four species. Based on our suggestion, we may claim that in fact the aesthetic is included - but it does not appear independently. As we mentioned, the etrog is not mentioned in the Bible by name, but is referred to as "peri etz hadar." This phrase does not only single out the etrog as a fruit, but focuses on its beauty as well. According to certain Rishonim, the beauty attributed to the etrog is an integral characteristic (see the attached shiur by R. Moshe Taragin on hadar). Moreover, we find an opinion that identifies the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge as an etrog.

Thus, the blossom turns into a fruit and, through the etrog, the aesthetic element is enlisted and joins the other species in the worship of God. However, this is possible only insofar as the beauty is expressed as a fruit, which is both "pleasing to behold and good for consumption." Beauty here is not an independent goal but rather is yoked to a higher purpose. Only thus can the aesthetic be redeemed and used to enhance human creativity and to inspire exalted spiritual objectives.

The Nature of the Mitzva of Lulav **Harav Yehuda Amital, zt"l**

"And you shall take on the first day the fruit of the hadar tree, branches of palm trees ... and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days." (Vayikra 23:40)

This verse seems to refer to both a one-day and a seven-day obligation. Chazal (Yerushalmi Sukka 3:11; see also Rashi, Sukka 41a) derive from here a distinction between the mitzva of lulav practiced within the mikdash (Temple) and the mitzva as proceeded in the "gevulin" (places other than the Temple). In the Temple, the obligation to take lulav lasts all seven days of the festival, whereas elsewhere the obligation is limited to the first day. According to several Rishonim, there are many other differences between the

first day and the rest of the holiday. The Rambam, for instance, believes that the distinctions listed in chapter 8 of his Hilkhhot Lulav render a lulav unfit only on the first day, but do not apply on the rest of the days.

Having established the uniqueness of the first day of Sukkot with respect to the other days, the question can be asked: "What underlies this distinction?"

Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik (in his Kovetz Chiddushei Torah) explains that the taking of the lulav fulfills different functions on the first day and on the rest of the holiday. On the first day (in the gevulin), the mitzva is a formal one of performing a specific act; however, the seven-day, mikdash-centered obligation is to rejoice before the Lord by means of taking the lulav. Rav Soloveitchik points to the verb usage in the source text as support for his theory, specifically, the shiur from "and you shall take" regarding the one-day obligation to "and you shall rejoice" in reference to the seven-day obligation. Rav Yerucham Fischel Perlow (in his commentary to Rav Sa'adia Gaon's Sefer Ha-mitzvot) makes a similar distinction and draws practical ramifications from it. For example, if a person were to take lulav on the first day outside of the Temple, and later he were to arrive at the Temple, he would be required to take lulav again, since the mitzva in the mikdash is one of rejoicing and not merely of lifting.

However, a mishna in Sukka (4:1) presents a difficulty to the above distinction. The mishna discusses the rabbinic decree that when the first day of Sukkot coincides with Shabbat, one should fulfill the mitzva of lulav at home and not at the Temple. (When the first day fell on Shabbat, people would bring their lulavim to the Temple before Shabbat and leave them there. When they came back on Shabbat, there was such a common surrounding the lulavim that people would be injured, and the rabbis decreed that people should leave their lulavim at home.) If indeed the requirement of lulav in the mikdash and in the gevulin are completely separate, how could performing the mitzva at home replace the mikdash-oriented obligation? (This, of course, assumes that Yerushalayim was not considered part of the "mikdash" for the purpose of this mitzva.) Rav Soloveitchik resolves this difficulty by qualifying his original position; the distinction between the one-day and seven-day obligation exists only on the final six days. On the first day itself, however, the two obligations are identical. Nevertheless, the dual-obligation approach to the mitzva of lulav can be attacked on a more fundamental level. The Rambam, both in Sefer Ha-mitzvot and in the heading to Hilkhhot Shofar Ve-lulav, counts lulav as a single mitzva. Moreover, he cites lulav as an example of a single mitzva which is performed at separate times (Sefer Ha-mitzvot, Shores 13).

From this it can be concluded that the mitzva of lulav is a single mitzva that consists of two

intertwining obligations: the requirement to perform the act of taking a lulav, and the aspect of rejoicing. On the first day, both obligations are present, as it had been in the mikdash. Only the rejoicing aspect remains during the final six days, although it is itself a fulfillment of the mitzva of lulav.

Now perhaps we can answer a question which has perplexed many. Mishna Sukka (3:1) ascertains the minimum length of a lulav as three tefachim (handbreadths) with which to shake the lulav. This implies that the obligation to shake the lulav is of Biblical authority, since it is the criterion used to regulate the minimum length of a proper lulav. This presents a difficulty for the Ba'al Ha-ittur, who explains that the obligation to shake the lulav (as opposed to lifting it) is of rabbinical authority.

This difficulty can be resolved in light of our conclusions. The obligation to shake the lulav falls within the rejoicing aspect of the mitzva, which essentially applies only in the mikdash, although rabbinically it has been extended to the gevulin as well. Thus, nowadays, the requirement of shaking the lulav is rabbinical in origin, and it is specifically to this situation which the Ba'al Ha-iur referred. (*Adapted by Aviad Hacohen; translated by Eli Fischer.*)
Based on a shiur by Harav Yehuda Amital

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's **Derashot Ledorot**

The Anatomy of an Etrog

The Rabbis were inclined to read a great deal of symbolic significance into the cluster of four species, the arba minnim, which we take in our hands in performance of the special mitzvah on this festival of Sukkot. It is in keeping with this sacred tradition that we may permit ourselves to indulge our imaginations and symbolically interpret certain details of this observance. Particularly, let us attempt to interpret the laws of the Halakhah as they relate to the anatomy of the etrog.

At either end of the etrog are two small appendages. At the base or broader end, where the fruit was originally attached to the tree, is the oketz, or stem. At the other end of the etrog, where it tapers off to a narrow point, is a small, brown, bulbous appendage, which biologists call the stigma and which in Hebrew is known as shoshanta. That word literally means "blossom," because it is shaped like a miniature blossom and is reminiscent of the flower of the etrog before the fruit was produced. In more colloquial parlance, this Stigma or shoshanta is called the pitem.

Whether the absence of either the oketz or the pitem disqualifies the etrog is a matter of opinion; our greatest authorities differed in their decisions. Thus, R. Jacob b. Yakar maintained that our major concern is the

pitem: if it is present, the etrog is valid for religious use, and if not it is disqualified. R. Isaac Halevi maintains that it is irrelevant whether or not the etrog contains a shoshanta or a pitem; what matters is that the etrog possess its oketz or stem. There is a third opinion, that of Rabbi Alfás, RaMBaM, and Tosafot, who require both the oketz and the pitem, and invalidate the etrog in the absence of either one. While the details of the Halakhic decision are rather intricate, we generally side with the third opinion and require the etrog to possess both stem and blossom (actually “stigma,” but following the Hebrew word shoshanta, we shall call it the “blossom”).

What do these represent? The pitem, as we have stated, looks like and reminds us of a blossom. It is a part of the fruit that protrudes as it grows, as if it were pointing in the direction of growth. It represents, therefore, the youthful openness to change, newness, the state of being pliable and alert and alive, in motion and full of promise. While the pitem represents change and growth, the oketz or stem is that which ties the fruit to the tree itself. It therefore symbolizes rootedness, stability, continuity, and endurance. While the pitem points to the future, the oketz binds to the past. An etrog to be kosher needs both: change and stability, newness and continuity, past and future.

The Halakhic reasoning for the need for these two appendages deepens this symbolic awareness. If there is no oketz on the etrog, it is disqualified because it is considered *haser*, incomplete or lacking; it is simply not a full etrog. If it has no pitem however, it is considered *shalem*, complete, but invalidated because it does not fulfill the requirement of *hadar*, beauty. It is simply not an attractive etrog, and this particular fruit must be *hadar* or beautiful: the very name “etrog” is unknown in the Bible, where it is simply called *peri etz hadar*, “the fruit of a beautiful tree.”

To lose the oketz, therefore, to sever one’s relations with his past and his roots, to forgo stability, is to be a *haser*, to lack something organic, part of one’s self. None of us is created out of air; we all are the latest links in long chains. Whether we like it or not, we each of us embody the entire past, and when we ignore that past we annihilate part of ourselves – we are *haser*, incomplete.

To be incapable of the pitem is to lack *hadar*, beauty. One who is not open to the future and who does not know how to change will find that his life is missing charm and freshness, vigor and color.

Judaism therefore reminds us that we must be both wholesome and handsome, complete and attractive, *shalem* and *hadar*: our lives must

possess both oketz and pitem, stem and blossom.

In youth, we all possess the pitem and tend to overlook the oketz. Youth is the time of growth, of blossoming, of change. Perhaps it is more than coincidence that the symbol of the pitem, that of the blossom, has been adopted in the peculiar idiom of contemporary youth: “flower-power!” In the obsession with change and blossoming, youth tends to ignore all that binds it to the past and to disdain those who represent such bonds. Once upon a time, the dividing line was the age of forty; today it is thirty and getting younger – everyone over that age is consigned to the limbo of the old-fashioned, those whom the tides of history have swept aside. Youth is full of revolutionary fervor and idealistic enthusiasm; it is messianic and Utopian. With increasing age, we tend to allow the pitem to wither, and become more conscious of the oketz: we accept membership in the established order of things, we are anxious to defend the gains of our own youth, we seek to instill a sense of tradition and contact with the past. We ourselves feel we have become part of the past that we wish to remember.

The etrog, therefore, reminds us of both. To those of us who are younger, it says: don’t ignore the oketz. Without roots and stem, no flowers can flourish and no beauty can endure. Do not imagine you can remain the people of the pitem forever; those who are today under thirty will someday be over thirty! And to those of the middle ages and over, the etrog says: do not deride the pitem on the etrog of life. There can be no real, active life without change and growth and promise and the exploration of new pathways and discovery of new horizons. This is true even in religious life. The great Besht told us that every individual must find his way to God both through his fathers and through his own searching. In our Amidah prayer we refer to God as *Elokei Avraham* and *Elokei Yitzhak* and *Elokei Yaakov* “–the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” Why do we not say simply, “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?” Because, answers the Besht, while it is true that each of the fathers accepted God because his own father had told him about Him, because religion was part of a cherished tradition, that was not enough; he also had to discover God by his own initiative. God was indeed *Elokei Avraham*, the God of Abraham. But Isaac had to find Him on his own and make Him *Elokei Yitzhak*, the God of Isaac. And Jacob, though he knew of God from his father and grandfather, he too had to discover Him on his own, and make of God the *Elokei Yaakov*. That is why we refer to the Almighty as both *Elokeinu* and *Elokei Avotenu*, “our God,” and “the God of our fathers.”

This means that we must be patient with the exuberance of youth. We must recognize that it is worth practicing restraint in order to have an etrog with a pitem. Youth has too much to contribute to dismiss its zeal because of its excesses, because it is sometimes, or even most of the times, irritating. But that is a law of life: whoever seeks to change the status quo will step on toes and evoke opposition. The late Rabbi Maimon used to point to the proximity of the two phrases in the prayer before the Shema: *oseh hadashot*, *baal milhamot*, “who does new things and is a warrior” – whoever seeks to innovate and introduce some new idea, will invariably evoke opposition and a struggle will ensue. But it is worth it: there can be no kosher etrog without a pitem.

Hence, a mature personality, like a beautiful and kosher etrog, will have both oketz and pitem, both stem and blossom. He will cherish the past and be open to the future. Each of us possesses, in his own personality, a liberal and conservative tendency, the ability to look to the future and to look to the past, to consolidate and to innovate. Both of these are important; a full personality can afford the absence of neither.

Similarly, a mature and viable organization, such as a synagogue or a school, will likewise possess both elements, and therefore be ready for change and yet seek stability, continue old and cherished traditions, yet never be afraid to experiment with new ideas and new forms.

A nation, in order to prosper, must have both qualities. In the absence of a pitem, it can turn repressive and tyrannical: when it lacks an oketz or roots, it becomes anarchic and wild.

Both these elements ought to be counterpoised, one against the other, in our personalities and in our community. According to Jewish law, the finest and most beautiful etrog is one in which the oketz and the pitem lie on one line or one axis: one against the other. The harmonious life is one in which there exists a balance between the elements of change and stability, innovation and consolidation, the old and the new, the loyalty to the past and the openness to the future. If we have too much of an oketz and too small a pitem, we become stodgy and stagnant, rigid and inflexible. If we have too big a pitem and too small an oketz, we become unsteady and erratic, vagrant and spasmodic.

Our world, the one we live in, is characterized primarily by the pitem, by the principle of change and growth. We seem to lack the oketz, for we are buffeted by vicissitudes and the winds of change – and this means that we must exercise extreme care and caution so that

balance may be restored. (Interestingly, the name “etrog,” as we mentioned, does not appear in the Bible. The word first appears in the Talmud, and linguists – see Alexander Kohut’s edition of the Arukh – tell us that the name “etrog” comes from the Persian *tarnag*, which has two meanings: one is, beautiful, and the other, to kindle a flame or stoke a fire. This is probably so because of both the color and the shape of the etrog fruit which reminds one of a flame. So the principle of change, symbolized by the pitem can be beautiful – and it can also be serviceable, even as fire is. But, again like fire, it can get out of hand and burn down an entire world.)

It is evident to any observer that our general society is like an etrog with an oversized pitem and a diminutive oketz. Our society is mobile, changing, unsteady. According to the latest statistics most Americans change residences every five years, and jobs almost as often, as large industries learn to pluck executives from one community and replace them in another ever so often. The American even changes spouses with not much greater infrequency. No wonder that he experiences anxiety, an awareness that he is lacking stem and root, and he seeks out this element of stability in ways that are sometimes silly and empty. Witness, for instance, the craze of possessing antique furniture, which sometimes is nothing more than socially sanctioned junk, as a way of expressing a desire to reach out to the past. Or, far sillier, the current obsession about obtaining the coat of arms that one’s ancestors purportedly used.

If this is true of the general community, it is even more true of the Jewish community. Here too we find an inane expression of the legitimate desire for oketz. For if in our Orthodox community we sometimes show signs of too big an oketz and too small a pitem of being too resistant to experimental approaches in education and in outer forms, there is a far greater problem in the rest of the community of an etrog that has an enormously large pitem and an oketz that has almost disappeared. The suburbanized Judaism of America is so grotesque as to be almost unrecognizable. In a recent study of a community that has been given the fictitious name of “Lakeville,” two sociologists, Marshall Sklare and Joseph Greenblum, describe the typical suburban Jew. Perhaps the best and most characteristic description is the statement to these sociologists by a woman member of the local Reform Temple: “I think most members of this congregation don’t want to be Jewish, but want to give their children more than they had, and this is the closest to nothing they can dream up.” An etrog – that is all pitem, with only a microscopic, artificial oketz! In the Jewish society of the Lakeville type, everything old must go, and yet – there is

an irrational search for the stem. This kind of Jew, therefore, is willing to cast away every symbol and observance of Jewishness, but is horrified if his child wants to marry out of the faith. Logically, it makes no sense: why should he not marry a non-Jew, if his own life is non-Jewish? Yet there is a desire for the oketz... The Lakeville Jew has long abandoned kashruth as just a vestigial dietary taboo – but he cannot survive a Sunday morning without his bagels... He professes no special belief in God, he certainly is embarrassed by talk of immortality, and yet he recites the Yizkor for his parents, and wants his children to do so for him when the time comes... So there is a minimal desire for the oketz, but it is so imbalanced with the pitem as to be weird – and also baser, incomplete, and invalid.

As individuals, therefore, as a people, as citizens and as members of individual institutions, we must seek to redress the balance and restore the harmony of oketz and pitem.

It is perhaps wisest to conclude with the words of an old Yiddish prayer, a *tehinah*, which may still be found in some of our older prayer books, and was probably recited by our grandmothers before performing the mitzvah of the *arba minnim*. It reads as follows: *Yehi ratzon milefanekha*, may it be Thy will, our God and God of our fathers, “that You forgive me for all the untoward and unattractive thoughts of my heart, in the merit of my having taken in my hand the etrog which was compared by our Rabbis to the heart of a man.”

Indeed, the etrog is like the heart; and the heart, like the etrog, must possess a harmonious blend of both elements in balance: change and stability, blossom and stem.

If, O Lord, our hearts are perchance found imbalanced in favor of one or the other extreme, then forgive us by virtue of holding in our hands the etrog, symbol of the heart; and may that same etrog teach us to restore the proper harmony, so that *Yehi ratzon milefanekha*, it shall be acceptable to Thee, our God and God of our fathers. Amen.



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Adapted and translated from

ימים טובים בהלכה by Rav Yissocher Frand

Eating in the Sukkah When It Rains on the First Night

Why Rishonim Disagree About Mitzta'er on First Night of Sukkos

The Collision of Two Rules. Few halachos of Sukkos bring two basic principles into such sharp conflict as a rainy first night. During the rest of the festival, a person who is *mitzta'er*, sufficiently uncomfortable in the *sukkah*, is exempt. The reason is תשובה כעין תדורו - *one must dwell in the sukkah in the manner in which one ordinarily lives at home*. If a person would leave his house because of the conditions, the Torah does not require him to remain in the *sukkah*.

The first night seems to pull in the opposite direction. The Gemara (Sukkah 27a) derives from the parallel use of עשר regarding Sukkos and Pesach that the first night of Sukkos is like the first night of Pesach: מה להלן לילה - הראשון חובה מכאן ואילך רשות - *just as there the first night is obligatory and afterward optional, so too here the first night is obligatory and afterward optional*. The Torah therefore requires an act of eating in the *sukkah* on the first night.

Those two rules create the real question. Does *mitzta'er* remain an exemption even on the first night, so that the special first-night obligation exists only when ordinary *sukkah*-dwelling is possible? Or did the comparison to matzah create an independent obligation to eat the first *kezayis* in the *sukkah* even when a person would ordinarily be exempt? Rain is the classic test case, but the dispute is really about the nature of the first-night mitzvah itself.

BS"D

What the Comparison to Matzah Adds. The discussion in Berachos 49b helps sharpen the issue. The Gemara distinguishes Rosh Chodesh from Shabbos and Yom Tov in *Bircas HaMazon*. On Shabbos and Yom Tov, if one omitted the required insertion and has already passed the point at which it can be supplied, he must repeat *Bircas HaMazon*, because שבתות וימים טובים - *on Shabbos and Yom Tov one cannot simply refrain from eating*. Tosafos asks how that can be reconciled with the Gemara in Sukkah, which says that after the first night eating is optional.

One answer in Tosafos limits the Berachos obligation to the first nights of Pesach and Sukkos. Rabbeinu Yehudah, however, explains that bread is required on Yom Tov generally because of *simchas Yom Tov*. When the Gemara in Sukkah calls eating optional after the first night, it means optional as a matter of *sukkah*: if rain makes him a *mitzta'er*, he may eat the Yom Tov meal indoors. The first night is different. Tosafos concludes with unusually explicit language: בלילה הראשונה בכל ענין חובה ואפילו יורדין גשמים חייב לאכול כזית - *on the first night the obligation applies in every circumstance, and even when rain is falling one must eat a kezayis in the sukkah*.

The Ran reaches the same underlying problem from another direction. He takes the Gemara in Berachos at face value that Yom Tov generally requires bread. If so, the *gezeirah shavah* from matzah cannot merely be telling us to eat a Yom Tov meal. It must add something specifically about eating in the *sukkah*. The Ran records one view that the first night turns even a *kezayis*, ordinarily too small to constitute a fixed meal, into the required act of *sukkah*-eating. He then cites another view that goes directly to our question: שאפילו ירדו גשמים חייב לאכול בסוכה - *even if rain falls, one is obligated to eat in the sukkah*. In other words, the comparison to matzah may create not merely a meal, but a first-night obligation strong enough to survive the conditions that ordinarily excuse a person from the *sukkah*.

Does Mitzta'er Still Apply on the First Night? The Rishonim divide precisely at this point. Chachmei Lunel, quoted by the Meiri, formulate the stricter view in conceptual terms: בלילה הראשונה הואיל והכתוב קבעו לחובה כמצה - *on the first night, since the Torah established it as an obligation like matzah, one remains obligated*. Their argument is not simply that the first night is more important. Ordinarily, *mitzta'er* relieves a person from the continuing obligation to live in the *sukkah* under abnormal conditions. But the first night contains a distinct positive command to perform a particular act of eating there. If that command parallels matzah, personal discomfort does not necessarily erase it.

The Rashba understands the structure very differently. In a responsum addressing precisely a rainy or uncomfortable first night, he writes לעולם לא - *the Torah never required eating in the sukkah except in the manner in which a person normally eats at home*. Therefore דמצטער פטור הוא - *a mitzta'er remains exempt*. On this view, תשובה כעין תדורו is not merely a dispensation that can be overridden by a stronger obligation. It defines what the mitzvah of *yeshivas sukkah* is. The first-night *gezeirah shavah* makes eating obligatory, but it does not transform an act that is not normal dwelling into *yeshivas sukkah*.

The dispute can therefore be stated sharply. For the stricter Rishonim, the first night creates an independent *chovas achilah* in the *sukkah* and the ordinary personal exemption of *mitzta'er* does not cancel it. For the Rashba, *mitzta'er* is built into the very definition of the mitzvah; where the Torah says that one need not dwell, there is no first-night act of *sukkah*-dwelling to perform.

Why Rain Becomes a Separate Question. Rain now becomes more than a convenient example. The Rosh and the Tosafos in Berachos quoted above take the stringent principle to its apparent conclusion: even rain does not remove the first-night obligation. But another approach allows a person to eat indoors while the rain is actually falling and requires him to return to the *sukkah* if the rain later stops. That approach needs explanation. If the first night overrides *mitzta'er*, why should rain be treated differently from cold, a foul smell, or another source of discomfort?

The Gra provides the key distinction. His practice is recorded in Maaseh Rav (217): while rain is actually falling one should not eat in the *sukkah*, דאז איך

night creates an independent command that can override ordinary personal discomfort. The Rashba follows naturally if תשוב כעין תדורו defines the mitzvah even on the first night. And the Gra's treatment of rain becomes understandable if rain can affect not merely the comfort of the person, but the very character of the dwelling. The practical *safek* preserved by the Mishnah Berurah is therefore the final expression of a much deeper question: what exactly did the Torah command when it made the first night of Sukkos a night of obligatory eating in the *sukkah*.

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IS SUKKOT A HUT, A CLOUD, OR SOMETHING ELSE?

Adapted from a lecture given by **Rabbi Moshe Y. Shulman**¹ for **Torah in Motion**

A Hut or a Cloud? There is a basic question about Sukkot that we probably think we know the answer to because we have heard the answer so many times. The Torah tells us, בסכת תשבו שבעת ימים כל האזרח בישראל ישבו בסכת למען – *You shall dwell in sukksos for seven days so that your generations will know that I caused Bnei Yisrael to dwell in sukksos when I brought them out of the land of Egypt* (Vayikra 23:42–43). The Torah does not simply command us to sit in the *sukkah*. It tells us that there is something we are supposed to *know* when we sit there, למען ידעו דרתיכם – *so that your generations will know*. That makes the historical meaning of the *sukkah* unusually important. What exactly are we supposed to know? What event are we reenacting? What were these sukksos in which Hashem says He caused Bnei Yisrael to dwell? The well-known answer begins with the Gemara in Sukkah 11b: כי בסכות הושבתי – *I caused Bnei Yisrael to dwell in sukksos: they were Clouds of Glory*, according to Rabbi Eliezer; Rabbi Akiva says that they made actual sukksos. That is the familiar dispute: were they *ananei hakavod*, the miraculous Clouds of Glory, or סוכות ממש, actual physical sukksos?

The meaning is part of the mitzvah. The Tur adopts the first approach and explains that the sukksos mentioned by the Torah were the Clouds of Glory with which Hashem surrounded Bnei Yisrael, שרבו ושמם – *so that the intense heat and sun would not strike them*. The purpose of our *sukkah* is therefore לזכור נפלאותיו ונוראותיו – *so that we remember His wonders and awesome deeds* (Tur, Orach Chaim 625). The Shulchan Aruch (1488 to 1575) follows this formulation as well and identifies the sukksos with the *ananei hakavod* that surrounded and protected Israel (Orach Chaim 625). The Bach (Rav Yoel Sirkis 1561-1640) makes the point even sharper. Normally, knowing the historical reason behind a mitzvah may deepen its performance, but here the Torah itself says למען ידעו. Therefore, says the Bach, one has not performed the mitzvah *properly* – without knowing the meaning of the *sukkah*. He explains that, עיקר הכוונה בישיבת הסוכה – *the central intention in sitting in the sukkah is to remember Yetziat Mitzrayim* (Bach, Orach Chaim 625). So this is not simply

If the Rain Stops. Suppose rain is falling at the beginning of the night, a person eats his Yom Tov meal indoors, and later the rain stops. The ordinary Yom Tov meal has been eaten, but the special first-night act may still be outstanding. On the approach that permits eating indoors during the rain, the obligation was not cancelled; it simply could not yet be performed in its proper setting. Once the *sukkah* again functions as a dwelling, the first-night obligation can be performed.

This distinction between the Yom Tov meal and the first-night *sukkah* obligation is crucial. It explains why a person who has already eaten and bentched indoors may still have to eat again in the *sukkah* after the rain stops. The meal was complete, but the separate first-night mitzvah was not. **The Practical Halachah.** The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 639:5) states the ordinary rule simply: ירדו גשמים הרי זה נכנס לתוך הבית – *if rain falls, one enters the house*. The Rema immediately distinguishes the first night: אבל – *on the first night one must eat a kezayis in the sukkah even if rain is falling*. The Rema thus gives practical weight to the Rosh, Ran and other Rishonim who understand the first-night obligation as surviving the usual exemption.

The Mishnah Berurah (639:35-36) emphasizes that major Rishonim hold that the exemption of *mitzta'er* applies even on the first night. The case is therefore treated as a genuine *safek*. One should eat the required first-night amount in the *sukkah* to satisfy the stringent view, but should not recite *leishev baSukkah*, because ספק ברכות להקל – *in a doubt concerning berachos we rule leniently*.

[CS: The Mishnah Berurah (639:35) cites a view that one should wait until *chatzos* for the rain to stop, but notes that the Eliyah Rabbah and Pri Megadim require waiting only an hour or two, and that delaying the family's meal excessively can itself detract from *simchas Yom Tov*. The latter view is generally relied upon in most communities.]

We explained the approach of Tosafot that if a person ate indoors while the rain was falling and the rain later stops, he must return to the *sukkah* and eat there. The reason is that although he has already eaten his Yom Tov meal, the special first-night obligation of eating in the *sukkah* remains unfulfilled.

[CS: The Mishnah Berurah (639:36) adds that even if he has already bentched, he should return to the *sukkah*, recite *leishev baSukkah*, and eat slightly more than a *kebeitzah*, in order to satisfy the opinions that the eating during the rain did not fulfill the first-night obligation. If he has already gone to bed, however, he need not get up.]

What the Machlokes Is Really About. The rainy first night of Sukkos is therefore not an isolated technical problem. It exposes three different ways of thinking about the mitzvah. First, what did the *gezeirah shavah* from matzah create: merely a requirement to eat, or an independent obligation to perform a particular act of eating in the *sukkah*? Second, what is *mitzta'er*: an exemption from an otherwise existing mitzvah, or part of the Torah's definition of what *yeshivas sukkah* means? And third, what is rain: simply another cause of personal discomfort, or a condition in which the *sukkah* itself is no longer functioning as normal residence?

Once those questions are separated, the Rishonim no longer appear to be giving disconnected rulings. The stringent view follows naturally if the first

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a nice explanation to tell over on Sukkot. According to the Bach, the Torah itself wants the person sitting in the sukkah to understand what the sukkah means.

But already the sources are more complicated than the way we normally present the issue. The Sifra records the same basic dispute with the names reversed: רבי אליעזר אומר סוכות ממש היו רבי עקיבא אומר בסוכות ענני כבוד היו – Rabbi Eliezer says they were actual sukkos, while Rabbi Akiva says they were Clouds of Glory (Sifra, Emor 12:17). The Mechilta similarly attributes סוכות to Rabbi Eliezer and *ananei hakavod* to Rabbi Akiva (Mechilta de-Rabbi Yishmael, Bo 14). The attribution is therefore not completely uniform, but for our purposes the more important question is not which Tanna held which view. The deeper question is what the two views mean. The *ananei hakavod* are easy enough to understand as something worth commemorating. Hashem miraculously protected an entire nation traveling through the desert. But what are we commemorating according to the opinion that סוכות ממש עשו – they simply built huts? People traveling through a wilderness need shelter. They construct temporary dwellings. Why should an ordinary practical response to desert conditions become a mitzvah observed by Jews thousands of years later? If the sukkos were merely huts, what exactly are we supposed to remember about them?

Why commemorate an ordinary hut? The Rashbam answers that question in a way that changes the focus of Sukkot entirely. He begins with the agricultural setting of the chag. Sukkot comes מגרן ומייבך, when a person has gathered in the produce of his threshing floor and winepress. The crop has succeeded. The grain is stored. The wine is ready. The house is full. At precisely that moment, says the Rashbam, the Torah tells him to leave his solid house and live in a temporary sukkah, למען תזכרו כי בסוכות הושבתי את בני ישראל – *so that you will remember that I caused Bnei Yisrael to live in sukkos in the wilderness for forty years, without permanent settlement and without an inheritance.* Why remember that precisely when the harvest is safely gathered? ומתוך כך תתנו הודאה למי – *as a result, you will give thanks to the One Who gave you an inheritance and houses filled with all good things.* And the Rashbam concludes with the Torah's warning, ואל תאמרו בלבבכם כחי ועוצם ידי – *do not say in your heart: my strength and the power of my hand made this prosperity for me* (Rashbam, Vayikra 23:43). According to the Rashbam, then, the very ordinariness of the original sukkah is the point. A person living in a secure house, surrounded by the produce of his land, needs to remember a time when the Jewish people had neither houses nor fields nor a permanent inheritance. The sukkah is the contrast to the settled home. It reminds us that what now seems permanent was once completely absent, and that the security we enjoy is not something we created entirely by ourselves.

A different significance of סוכות ממש. Rabbeinu Bachya (1255–1340) develops another aspect of the same opinion. If Bnei Yisrael lived in actual sukkos, he explains, then the mitzvah is intended to publicize גודל מעלתן של – *the extraordinary greatness of Israel in the wilderness.* An entire nation traveled through the desert with men, women and children in a place where naturally human beings cannot live. He cites the descriptions ארץ ציה ושממה – *a parched and desolate land* – and לא מקום זרע ותאנה וגפן – *not a place of seed, figs or vines* (Rabbeinu Bachya, Vayikra 23:43). So the Rashbam and Rabbeinu Bachya read the same physical sukkah in two somewhat different ways. The Rashbam emphasizes what Israel lacked: no home, no land, no stable economy, no permanent settlement. Rabbeinu Bachya emphasizes what Israel possessed: the extraordinary willingness to follow Hashem into a place where ordinary human life should have been impossible. The hut itself was not miraculous. What was remarkable was a people willing to live in those huts and continue into the wilderness because Hashem led them there.

But did they actually live in sukkos? That already gives us a much richer understanding of סוכות ממש, but there is a difficulty that forces us to look more closely at the biblical descriptions of life in the desert. If Bnei Yisrael spent forty years living in sukkos, why does the Torah repeatedly tell us that

they lived in *ohalim*? When the manna falls, Moshe says *each man shall take for those in his tent* (Shemot 16:16). When Moshe goes out to the Ohel Moed after the sin of the Golden Calf, *each man at the entrance of his tent* (Shemot 33:8). When the people complain in the episode of the meat, *Moshe heard the people crying, family by family, each man at the entrance of his tent* (Bamidbar 11:10). During Korach's rebellion, Moshe tells the people *move away from the tents of these wicked men* (Bamidbar 16:26). Even at the end of the journey, as the nation prepares to cross the Jordan, Yehoshua describes *the people traveling from their tents to cross the Jordan* (Yehoshua 3:14). Again and again, the ordinary dwelling of the people is called an *ohel*. That does not make סוכות impossible, and the terms need not be mutually exclusive in every context, but it certainly makes us stop. If the Torah wanted us to remember that the people spent forty years living in physical sukkos, it is striking that when Tanach casually describes their homes, the repeated word is *ohel*.

The Rokeach's surprising answer. The Rokeach (Rav Eleazar of Worms - 1176–1238) cites an interpretation according to which the sukkos mentioned by the Torah were not the ordinary homes of Bnei Yisrael throughout the forty years in the wilderness at all. They were military shelters used later, as the Jewish people began fighting their way toward Eretz Yisrael: *when they besieged the land of the Amorites of Sihon and Og and the fortified cities of the Land of Canaan, Israel then lived in sukkos* (Rokeach, Hilchot Sukkot 219). In other words, סוכות ממש may refer not to forty years of domestic life but to the temporary shelters of a nation on military campaign. The Rokeach has a striking biblical precedent for using the word *sukkah* this way. When David HaMelech brings Uriah home from the battlefield and expects him to go home to his wife, Uriah refuses. How can he enjoy the comforts of his house while the nation remains at war? He says, *the Aron, Israel and Yehudah are dwelling in sukkos, and my master Yoav and my master's servants are encamped in the open field* (II Shmuel 11:11). There the word *sukkos* clearly describes the temporary shelters of soldiers in the field. We find a similar usage in the war between Ben-Hadad and Israel, where Ben-Hadad and the kings with him are drinking פספות while the army prepares for battle against Shomron (I Melachim 20:12, 16). Here too, sukkos are associated with a military encampment.

When does Yetziat Mitzrayim end? If that is the background, the Rokeach is proposing something quite remarkable. The Torah's statement כי בסוכות הושבתי את בני ישראל may not be describing where Jews slept during most of the wilderness journey. It may be describing the final stage of their journey from Egypt to settled life in Eretz Yisrael, when they were encamped outside enemy cities, living in temporary field shelters while fighting Sihon and Og and beginning the conquest of the Land. But immediately we should object: the Torah says *when I brought them out of Egypt*. The wars against Sihon and Og took place in the fortieth year. How can an event forty years later still be called part of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*? The Rokeach answers that question directly. As long as the people had not yet conquered and divided the Land, the entire process could still be called *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. He points to the Torah's own language concerning territory conquered from Sihon, *which Moshe and Bnei Yisrael defeated when they came out of Egypt*. Those battles took place in the fortieth year, yet the Torah itself calls them *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, in this usage, is therefore not merely the moment the people walked through the gates of Egypt. It is the larger historical movement from slavery to national independence and settlement.

That changes the meaning of the sukkah again. The sukkah becomes the dwelling of a people who are no longer slaves, but are not yet settled. They have left Egypt, but they have not yet reached the security of a permanent home in their Land. The sukkah is the architecture of transition. And the

Rokeach explains why that transition must be remembered: שלא יחשבו מאבותינו אברהם ויצחק ויעקב נאחזו יושבים בארץ אלא ידעו שיצאו ממצרים וצרו על הערים – *they should not think: we live in the Land simply because of our forefathers Avraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov; rather, they should know that they left Egypt, besieged the cities, and Hashem delivered those cities into the hands of Israel* (Rokeach, Hilchot Sukkot 219). This is very close to the Rashbam, but it is not quite the same. The Rashbam is concerned about the individual looking at his prosperity and saying *my own power produced all of this*. The Rokeach is concerned about a people looking at an established national existence and forgetting the historical process by which it arrived there. The covenant with Avraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov is real, but possession of the Land did not simply descend automatically from the Avos to their descendants. There was Egypt. There was redemption. There was wilderness. There were battles. There were encampments outside fortified cities. And there was Divine assistance in turning a former slave nation into a people settled in its own Land. The sukkah tells the settled Jew not to erase the road that led to settlement. **The first Sukkot.** But the Rokeach has another passage that takes us in a different direction. He returns to the very first journey out of Egypt and writes, ומרעמסס באו לסכות על אותן סכות היה רבי אליעזר אומר סכות ממש היה רבי, *from Ramses they came to Sukkot; concerning those sukkot Rabbi Eliezer said they were actual sukkos, while Rabbi Akiva said they were Clouds of Glory* (Rokeach, Hilchot Sukkot 219). That is a striking formulation because the Rokeach connects the dispute about הושבתי כי with the Torah's statement immediately after the Exodus, ויסעו בני ישראל – *Bnei Yisrael journeyed from Ramses to Sukkot* (Shemot 12:37). Now we have to ask a completely different question. We assumed throughout that *sukkot* in our verse must be a thing, either huts or Clouds of Glory. But in Shemot, Sukkot appears to be a place.

Hut, cloud, or location? That brings us back to the Mechilta, which on ויסעו actually gives not two interpretations but three. Rabbi Eliezer says *they were actual sukkos*. He proves that *sukkot* can mean physical huts from the story of Yaakov: ויעקב נסע סכתה ויבן לו בית – *Yaakov traveled to Sukkot; he built himself a house and made sukkot for his livestock, and therefore he called the name of the place Sukkot* (Bereishit 33:17). Rabbi Akiva says אין *Sukkot means the Clouds of Glory*. But the Chachamim offer a third interpretation: אין סוכות אלא מקום שנאמר ויסעו מסוכות ויחנו באיתם מה – *Sukkot means nothing other than a place, as it says: They traveled from Sukkot and encamped at Etham. Just as Etham is a place, so Sukkot is a place* (Mechilta de-Rabbi Yishmael, Bo 14). That is the third possibility: hut, cloud, or location.

At first glance, the opinion of the Chachamim seems to remove almost all the religious significance. If Sukkot is simply the name of a place, what is there to commemorate? Bnei Yisrael left Ramses and traveled to a location called Sukkot. Why would that become the background to a mitzvah observed for all generations? But perhaps that question is precisely what makes the opinion so interesting. The Torah says ויסעו בני ישראל מרעמסס סכתה – *Bnei Yisrael journeyed from Ramses to Sukkot*. Ramses represents the world from which they are emerging. It is one of the central names associated with Egyptian servitude. Now, for the first time, an entire nation moves away from that world. The Chizkuni emphasizes Ramses as the place from which they emerged into freedom (Chizkuni, Shemot 12:37). Before Kriat Yam Suf, before Sinai, before the manna, before the Mishkan and before Eretz Yisrael, the first movement of the Jewish people as a free nation is from מרעמסס – *from Ramses to Sukkot*. Perhaps Sukkot, then, is not important because something spectacular happened there. It is important because it is the first place on the other side of slavery.

The geography of freedom. A slave may be legally released at a particular instant, but a people must actually begin to move away from the world that enslaved them. ויסעו – *they traveled*. They left the place in which their identity had been defined by someone else. Their first destination was Sukkot. And now the three interpretations in the Mechilta are not as

unrelated as they first seemed. What does freedom require? According to one view, סוכות ממש: the willingness to leave permanent structures behind and live temporarily, dependent upon Hashem. According to Rabbi Akiva, *ananei hakavod*: Divine protection that allows the people to survive the journey. And according to the Chachamim, Sukkot is a *makom*: freedom begins by leaving one place and entering another. The sukkah, in that sense, is not simply a house of a particular construction. It represents the condition of a people moving between worlds.

From Egypt to Zion. That also helps us appreciate something unusual in Rabbi Akiva's proof for the *ananei hakavod*. The Mechilta does not stop with the past. It turns to Yeshayahu's vision of the future: *כי על כל כבוד חפה – over all the glory there will be a canopy*, followed by וסכה תהיה לצל יומם מהרב – *there will be a sukkah for shade from the heat by day, and for shelter and refuge from storm and rain* (Yeshayahu 4:5–6). And then the Mechilta adds the verse ופדויי יה ישובו ובאו ציון ברנה ושמחת עולם על – *those redeemed by Hashem will return, and they will come to Zion in joy, with everlasting happiness upon their heads* (Yeshayahu 35:10). Think about the sweep of that Mechilta. It begins with the first journey out of Egypt, מרעמסס סכתה. It speaks of the Divine protection associated with the journey through the wilderness. And suddenly it is speaking about the future return to Zion. The sukkah is placed in the middle of the entire story. At one end is Ramses, slavery and the first departure. At the other end is ובאו ציון – *they will come to Zion in joy*. Between the two is the sukkah, a structure that by definition is not quite permanent, the dwelling of people who are still on a journey.

One sukkah, many dimensions. Perhaps that is the common denominator of all these explanations. The *ananei hakavod* tell us that the Jewish people could not have survived the journey without Hashem's protection. The Rashbam's physical sukkah tells us not to mistake present prosperity for something we created entirely by ourselves. Rabbeinu Bachya's sukkah reminds us of the faith of a generation willing to enter a wilderness in which ordinary human life was impossible. The Rokeach's military sukkah recalls the point at which *Yetziat Mitzrayim* was being completed, when a former slave nation lived in temporary shelters while fighting its way toward settlement. And the Chachamim's Sukkot as a place takes us back to the very first station, the first movement away from Egypt. These are not necessarily competing philosophical explanations of the mitzvah, but they all expose a different dimension of what a sukkah represents: protection without permanence, movement without yet having arrived, and the refusal to confuse the security of the present with the way Jewish history actually unfolded.

למען ידעו דורותיכם. That may be why the Torah chooses the language למען ידעו דורותיכם – *so that your generations will know*. A permanent house can make us forget how we arrived there. Once a person is settled, the journey can begin to look unnecessary. The house seems natural. The field seems natural. The country seems natural. The life we have now begins to look as though it was always there. For seven days the Torah tells us to leave that illusion. We remember ממש *ananei hakavod*. We remember those who followed Hashem into the wilderness. We remember the soldiers encamped outside cities they had not yet conquered. We remember that the fortieth-year battles could still be called מצרים because leaving Egypt was a process, not merely a date on the calendar. And we remember the very first ויסעו, when Bnei Yisrael moved from Ramses toward a place called Sukkot. The sukkah is not merely a memorial to one object that existed somewhere in the desert. It is a memorial to the Jewish journey from dependence upon Egypt to dependence upon Hashem, from slavery toward freedom, from homelessness toward inheritance, and ultimately from exile toward return. The structure is temporary, but the journey it represents is the story of Jewish history.

Adapted and translated from

מועדים וזמנים – חלק א' by Harav Moshe Shternbach (b. 1926)

The Naanum of the Lulav: Netilah and Hallel

The Brisker Rav: Naanuim Are Part of Netilas Lulav. The Brisker Rav, Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveichik (1868-1959), derived an important principle from the Rambam's description of *netilas lulav*. The Rambam writes that the mitzvah in its proper form includes moving the Four Species outward and back and upward and downward. Rav Shternbuch summarizes the Brisker Rav's point in unusually direct language: *it is clear that the mitzvah of naanuim belongs to the netilah, and through it netilas lulav is performed in its proper form.* The *naanuim* are therefore not necessary for basic *yetziah*, but they belong to the proper performance of the *netilah* itself.

That produces the Brisker Rav's practical ruling: ולכן חידש מרן זצ"ל שצריכים: *therefore he ruled that one should be particular to perform the naanuim with that same lulav.* Rav Shternbuch explains that the same principle applies where the *naanuim* in *Hallel* are the *naanuim* through which the original *netilah* is being completed *kehilchasah*.

The Extra Tefach of the Lulav. Rav Shternbuch next points to the halachic measurement of the *lulav*. The *hadasim* and *aravos* require three *tefachim*, while the *lulav* must extend an additional *tefach*. The Gemara explains the added length with the words *so that one can wave it*. Rav Shternbuch treats this as evidence that the capacity for *naanuim* is built into the halachic form of the *lulav*, not merely added afterward as an unrelated ceremony. He therefore writes: *it is clear that, lechatchilah, naanuim are required as part of the primary mitzvah of netilah.* The point is not that one who omitted them was not *yotzei*, but that a proper *netilah* includes them.

Why Chinuch Begins When a Child Knows How to Wave. The Mishnah's rule concerning a child becomes strong evidence for this conception. Rav Shternbuch writes: *a child who knows how to perform the naanuim is obligated in lulav; this implies that naanuim belong to the primary mitzvah of netilah, and a child who cannot yet perform the mitzvah properly is not yet obligated.* The Mishnah does not make *chinuch* depend merely on the child's ability to lift the Four Species, even though lifting is sufficient for an adult's basic *yetziah*. Rav Shternbuch explains the reason in terms of *chinuch*: *the root of a child's obligation is chinuch, training him to perform the mitzvos as he will when he is older.* *Chinuch* therefore begins when he can perform *netilas lulav* in its prescribed form, not merely its minimum *bedieved* form.

Three Movements in Each Direction. Rav Shternbuch also uses this approach to explain why the Rishonim rule stringently concerning the Yerushalmi's doubt whether one must perform three movements in each direction. Ordinarily we would expect *safek derabbanan lekula*. But here the *naanuim*, although rabbinic, are not simply an unrelated rabbinic act. They are the preferred completion of the *netilah*. Rav Shternbuch therefore characterizes them as *the preferred performance through which the netilah is brought to completion in its proper form.*

Which Naanuim? A second question then arises. There are *naanuim* associated with the initial taking and *berachah*, and there are *naanuim* during *Hallel*. Are the later *Hallel naanuim* always a separate rabbinic obligation? Rav Shternbuch says this is not clear. The Rambam does not expressly describe a separate set of *naanuim* immediately after the *berachah*; he describes the movements and then identifies their place in *Hallel*. Thus, if a person takes the Four Species shortly before *Hallel* and has not yet performed the *naanuim*, the *Hallel naanuim* can themselves be the *naanuim* through which his *netilah* becomes *mitzvah kehilchasah*. But if he took the Four Species earlier and already performed the full *naanuim*, Rav Shternbuch suggests that the later waving in *Hallel* may have a different status. He writes that one who took and waved before *davening* יצא כבר בזה *has already fulfilled the mitzvah in its preferred form*, and the later *Hallel naanuim* may be only *minhag*.

The Raavyah and the Rosh. Rav Shternbuch finds what he calls strong support for this distinction in the Rishonim: ומצאתי מקור נאמן לסברתינו

שהנענועים דהלל אינם חיוב מדרבנן שהרא"ש מביא בשם הראב"ה שבנענועים דהלל סגי *I found reliable support for our view that the Hallel naanuim are not a rabbinic obligation: the Rosh cites the Raavyah (Rabbi Eliezer ben Yoel HaLevi c. 1140-1225) that in Hallel a simple waving suffices, while at the berachah one performs the full three movements outward and back.* Rav Shternbuch adds that the Rosh records this view without objection. The differing form of the two sets of *naanuim* supports his suggestion that the first are the principal *naanuim* completing *netilas lulav*, while the later *Hallel naanuim*, once that obligation has already been fulfilled, may be rooted in *minhag* rather than in a second full rabbinic obligation.

The Chofetz Chaim. Rav Shternbuch in a footnote adds a striking report concerning the Chofetz Chaim (1838-1933) during the war, when *esrogim* were unavailable in Russia. He writes: *he obtained an esrog from the previous year with which to fulfill the mitzvah, but used it only for the berachah and not for the naanuim during Hallel.* Rav Shternbuch explains that the Chofetz Chaim refrained from the additional waving because others had no *esrog* and seeing him perform the extra *naanuim* would cause them pain. The inference Rav Shternbuch draws is explicit: *this shows that in his view the Hallel naanuim are not an obligation by law, but are rooted in minhag.*

The Shaagas Aryeh. The *Shaagas Aryeh* (Rav Aryeh Leib Gunzburg 1695-1785), however, appears to point in the other direction. Rav Shternbuch quotes him: *the Shaagas Aryeh rules that one may not carry a lulav after already fulfilling the mitzvah merely in order to perform the Hallel naanuim, because a rabbinic mitzvah is not considered a Yom Tov need.* Rav Shternbuch comments: *his words imply that the Hallel naanuim are a rabbinic obligation, and this is difficult.* Rav Shternbuch's difficulty is that the primary *naanuim* are more than an ordinary rabbinic practice: they are what make the *netilah kehilchasah*. And once those principal *naanuim* have already been performed, the later *Hallel naanuim* may be less, not more, obligatory: *all the more so the Hallel naanuim, which may be only minhag.* He nevertheless notes that this does not necessarily decide the separate law of *hotza'ah*, because even an accepted *minhag* may provide sufficient Yom Tov purpose for carrying.

Rav Shternbuch's Conclusion. Rav Shternbuch ultimately distinguishes the cases. First: *ולע"ד יוצא מכל מה שביארנו שאם מברך לפני התפלה לצאת חובת המצוה* *if one makes the berachah before davening in order to fulfill the mitzvah and also performs the naanuim, he has thereby fulfilled the principal form of the mitzvah.* In that case, *ואז כשנוטל עוד פעם להלל, when he takes the lulav again for Hallel, the later naanuim are rooted in minhag.* But if he did not perform *naanuim* earlier and instead takes the *lulav* before *Hallel*, Rav Shternbuch says: *מש"כ אי לא נענע by contrast, if he did not wave before davening and takes the lulav before Hallel in order to perform the principal mitzvah, then* *לפני התפלה רק נוטל לפני הלל לקיים עיקר מצות לולב אז מקיים בנענועים עיקר מצות נטילת לולב כהלכתה through those naanuim he performs the principal mitzvah of netilas lulav in its proper form.*

This also sharpens the Brisker Rav's ruling about using the same Four Species. Where the *naanuim* are the *naanuim* completing the original *netilah*, they should be performed with the same *lulav* and *esrog*. If the principal *naanuim* were already performed earlier, however, the later *Hallel naanuim* may be only *minhag*, and the same-set requirement is correspondingly less clear. Rav Shternbuch ends cautiously: *the matter still requires clarification from the Poskim.*

Adapted and translated from

רוח אליהו על המועדים (published Sept. 2026)

by Rav Elya Svei (1924-2009)

Succos: Leaving the Permanent Dwelling and Fixed Ways

Returning to the Midbar. The Pesikta gives a striking description of the mitzvos of Succos. Hashem tells Klal Yisrael, בְּסוּכּוֹת תֵּשְׁבוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים לִמְעַן יֵדוּ - *For seven days you shall dwell in sukkos, so that your generations will know that I caused Bnei Yisrael to dwell in sukkos*, and then adds, אֵין אַתֶּם גּוֹמְלִין לִי אֵלָּא פּוֹרְעִין לִי - *You are not conferring anything upon Me; you are merely repaying what you owe* (Pesikta DeRav Kahana in addendum at end; Yalkut Shimoni, Emor 247). Succos asks us to repay a debt of memory, to recover the awareness created when Hashem took us from Egypt and sustained us in the Midbar. The Midrash continues, וְעוֹד אָמַרְתִּי לָכֶם שֶׁתִּקְחוּ לֹלֶב וְתִנְעֲנְעוּ לִפְנֵי - *I also told you to take the lulav and wave it before Me*, אֵין אַתֶּם גּוֹמְלִין לִי אֵלָּא פּוֹרְעִין לִי, because בשָׁעָה שֶׁהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם עָשִׂיתִי אֶת הָהָרִים לִנְעֹנֵעַ מִלִּפְנֵיכֶם - *When I took you from Egypt, I caused the mountains to move before you*. Thus, the *passuk* says, הָהָרִים רָקְדוּ כְּאִילִים גְּבוּעוֹת כִּבְנֵי צֶאֱן, *The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like young sheep* (Tehillim 114:4). This is a key to the Yom Tov. The miracles of the Midbar were not merely events to remember; they were meant to create, for all generations, a way of seeing the world.

At the Word of Hashem. For forty years, ordinary human existence should have been impossible. Food, water, protection, direction, and every basic need came from Hashem. The Torah sums up that life in one refrain: עַל פִּי ה' - *At the word of Hashem they encamped, and at the word of Hashem they traveled* (Bamidbar 9:23). The lesson was not merely that Hashem can perform miracles. It was that every movement of life is under His direction.

Even the open miracles of Yetziyas Mitzrayim were not enough by themselves to engrave this truth into Klal Yisrael. Forty years of journeys were necessary. Emunah had to be learned not only by witnessing wonders, but by living day after day without independent certainty of where they would be tomorrow, and discovering that Hashem provides every need. That is why Succos must be renewed every year. A soldier may complete his initial training, but he periodically returns to reinforce what he learned. So too, we step out of ordinary life and return to the Midbar. The house, livelihood, schedule, and routines on which we rely are useful, but they are not our security. The prophet describes the future geulah with the words כִּי - *As in the days when you left Egypt, I will show him wonders* (Michah 7:15). The Midbar remains the school in which Klal Yisrael learns how to live with Hashem.

Leaving the Permanent Dwelling. The Gemara defines the sukkah through the phrase צֵא מִדִּירְתָּ קִבְעָה וּשְׁבָה בְּדִירְתָּ עֲרָא - *Leave your permanent dwelling and sit in a temporary dwelling* (Sukkah 2a). This is more than a technical description of the mitzvah. A person becomes attached to fixed patterns. His house must look this way, his schedule must remain that way, and his habits and assumptions begin to feel like part of his identity. Succos physically removes him from that fixedness.

This is why Succos follows immediately after the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah and Yom Kippur. Teshuvah cannot be limited to regretting isolated acts while preserving the road that produced them. The Navi says, יַעֲזֹב רָשָׁע דְּרָכּוֹ - *Let the wicked abandon his path and the sinful man his thoughts, and let him return to Hashem* (Yeshayahu 55:7). The emphasis is on דְּרָכּוֹ וְאִשׁ אֹן מַחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ - *his path and his thoughts*.

Sometimes the problem is not one wrong act but a settled *derech*, an entire way of thinking and living. Rabbeinu Yonah distinguishes between one who stumbled under the pressure of the *yetzer hara* and one who has made sin into a settled way of life. For the latter, the beginning of *teshuvah* is to abandon that path and those thoughts before turning to regret and confession (Shaarei Teshuva 1:11). The Rambam makes the same point: אַל תֹּאמַר שֶׁאֵין תְּשׁוּבָה אֵלָּא מִעֲבִירוֹת שֶׁיֵּשׁ בָּהֶן מַעֲשֶׂה - *Do not say that teshuvah applies only to sins of action; a person must also search out his heretical views and repent from them* (Hilchos Teshuvah 7:3). Succos gives this demand a physical form: leave what feels permanent. After Yom Kippur, the question is not only whether we regret what we did, but whether we are willing to move.

This also answers the familiar question of why the sukkah is celebrated in Tishrei rather than Nissan, when Bnei Yisrael actually left Egypt. Its place immediately after Yom Kippur is itself part of its message. צֵא מִדִּירְתָּ קִבְעָה וּשְׁבָה בְּדִירְתָּ עֲרָא - *Leave the permanent dwelling and sit in a temporary dwelling* means that yesterday's *kevius* need not control the person who has just done *teshuvah*. The supposedly permanent world is itself only a corridor: הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה - *This world is like a corridor before the World to Come; prepare yourself in the corridor so that you may enter the palace* (Avos 4:16).

The Four Minim: Turning the Enemy into a Weapon. The four minim carry the same message into the days after judgment. The Tikkunei Zohar describes them as instruments of victory: וּבְאֵלֵין מֵאֵין קִרְבָּא אֵינוֹן יִשְׂרָאֵל רְשִׁימִין - *With these weapons of battle, Bnai Israel are marked as having prevailed in judgment*. It continues, לִקְרַבְתָּ בְּמֵאֵין קִרְבָּא בִּידֵיהוֹן - *Look at those marked by the weapons in their hands, and you will know who prevailed in judgment* (Tikkunim 29a). The four minim are therefore not decorative signs of victory. They are *weapons of battle*.

Why these particular weapons? The Midrash connects each species to a central faculty of the person: לִלְבָּב דּוֹמָה לְלֹב דּוֹמָה לְעֵינַיִם - *The esrog resembles the heart, the lulav the spine, the hadas the eyes, and the aravah the lips* (Vayikra Rabbah 30:14). These are precisely the powers through which a person desires, stands, sees, speaks, and acts. Before *teshuvah*, they can become his enemies. After *teshuvah*, they become the weapons with which he serves Hashem. The self that once pulled him away has been reclaimed.

This returns us to the deeper human condition described by Koheles: הָאֱלֹקִים - *G-d made man upright, but they sought many schemes* (Koheles 7:29). The work of *teshuvah* is to restore the person to that original straightness. When the heart, eyes, body, and speech return to their proper task, the very faculties that had endangered him become his strength.

Protection After Yom Kippur

The Vil Gaon reads the words of Tehillim as an allusion to the mitzvos and avodos of Succos: כִּי יִצְפְּנִי בִּסְכָּה בְּיוֹם רָעָה יִסְתִּירֵנִי בְּסֹתֵר אֱהֹלֹ בְּצוּר יִרְמָמְנִי וְעֵתָה - *He will conceal me in His sukkah on the day of trouble, hide me in His shelter, and raise my head above the enemies around me* (Tehillim 27:5-6). Protection and victory are woven throughout the festival.

Why is so much protection necessary immediately after Yom Kippur? Because a person has become, in a real sense, different, cleaner and spiritually more precious. Precisely then he needs greater guarding. Succos surrounds what Yom Kippur created with mitzvos: sukkah, the four minim, Hallel, simchah, and the other avodos of the festival. Their purpose is not simply to add new experiences, but to preserve what Yom Kippur achieved. This also explains the place of simchah. Joy itself protects. A person guards what he values. When he rejoices in what he has received and senses its worth, he is less likely to surrender it. The joy of Succos is therefore not a retreat from the seriousness of Yom Kippur. It is one of the ways Yom Kippur survives.

Within the Ananei HaKavod. The Midbar was also the place in which Klal Yisrael learned that Hashem Himself was enough. On the words יִמְצְאוּ בָּאָרֶץ - *He found him in a wilderness land* (Haazinu 32:10), Rashi explains that Hashem found Israel faithful because they accepted His Torah, His kingship, and His yoke. The Rashbam explains מִצְאָה in the sense of sufficient provision: in the Midbar, Hashem was the source from which every need was supplied. The wilderness stripped away ordinary supports so that Klal Yisrael could discover what it means to depend upon Hashem without illusion.

The Ananei HaKavod therefore did more than protect from heat and danger. They created a distinct spiritual space. Moshe asked Hashem, וּנְפִלְנוּ אֲנִי וְעַמִּי - *I and Your people shall be distinguished from every nation upon the earth* (Shemos 33:16). The clouds were part of that

separation. Especially after the *Chet haEgel*, Klal Yisrael required not only forgiveness, but a protected environment in which renewed closeness to Hashem could survive. The sukkah recreates that enclosure. Its walls are temporary, but what they protect is permanent.

Conclusion: A Yearly Reorientation. Succos therefore does far more than commemorate an ancient miracle. It reenacts the education of the Midbar. We leave the illusion of permanence and return to יסעו פי ה' - *At the word of Hashem they encamped, and at the word of Hashem they traveled.* What was seen at Yetziyas Mitzrayim had to become lived *emunah* through forty years of dependence. What was achieved on Yom Kippur must likewise become a new way of living. The sukkah loosens our old *kevius*, the four minim place our recovered faculties back into our hands as *קרבא* - *weapons of battle*, and the joy and protection of the Yom Tov help preserve what *teshuvah* has created.

For seven days we return to the Midbar so that, when we return home, we will see the home differently. Livelihood, routine, and human plans are necessary, but they are not the source of security. The only true permanence is attachment to Hashem. That is the yearly work of Succos: to leave the permanent dwelling long enough to discover what is truly permanent.

Adapted and summarized from

הלכה by Rav Shlomo Yosef Zevin (1888–1978)

THE LAWS OF THE ARBA MINIM

The Structure of the Laws

The laws of the *lulav* and its accompanying species fall into three broad groups. Some are general principles of *mitzvos* that the Gemara develops through the Four Species; others are laws shared by all four species; and still others belong to one species alone. The Four Species thus become a meeting place for some of the broadest concepts in halachah and some of its most exacting details.

A Mitzvah That Comes Through an Aveirah. The Mishnah opens with the rule -לולב הגזול והיבש פסול - *a stolen or dried lulav is invalid* (Mishnah Sukkah 3:1; Sukkah 29b). From the stolen *lulav* emerges the general principle of מצוה - *a mitzvah that comes through an aveirah*. On the first day a stolen *lulav* is already excluded by -לכם - *it must be yours* (Vayikra 23:40). The Gemara therefore asks why theft still disqualifies it on the later days, when personal ownership is no longer required, and answers משום מצוה הבאה בעבירה - *because the mitzvah comes through an aveirah* (Sukkah 30a). The Gemara compares the stolen object to a lame animal offered on the mizbeach: -גזול דומיא דפסא - *the stolen is like the lame*. Just as the lame animal cannot be repaired for the offering, the stolen object remains disqualified. It connects this with -כי אני ה' אהב משפט שגא גזל בעולה - *I Hashem love justice and hate robbery in an offering* (Yeshayahu 61:8).

The Gemara adds a striking parable. A king passing a customs house tells his attendants to pay the duty even though the customs revenue belongs to him, -ממני ילמדו בני ויבריהו עצמן - *let all travelers learn from me not to evade the customs*. So too, Hashem says, -ממני ילמדו בני ויבריהו עצמן - *let My children learn from Me to keep themselves from theft* (Sukkah 30a). The point is not merely that theft is forbidden. The mitzvah itself cannot become the vehicle through which the theft is consummated.

Tosafos define the central case as -שמחמת העבירה באה המצוה - *the mitzvah comes about because of the aveirah*. The Pnei Yehoshua uses this to explain Shmuel's statement concerning the second day, -מתוך שיוצא בשאול יוצא בגזול - *since one fulfills the mitzvah with a borrowed lulav, one can also fulfill it with a stolen one*. Shmuel is certainly not permitting theft. Rather, where ownership is unnecessary, the theft is not what makes performance possible, since the same object could have been used as a loan. Rabbeinu Chananel, however, applies *mitzvah haba'ah ba'aveirah* more broadly, even to an *asheirah* and an *ir hanidachas*. The laws of *lulav* thus raise the larger question whether the aveirah must itself produce the mitzvah, or whether an object associated with aveirah may be intrinsically unfit for mitzvah use.

Bal Tosif. The Four Species also illustrate *bal tosif*, the prohibition against adding to a mitzvah. The Torah says -לא תוסיף עליו ולא תגרע ממנו - *do not add to*

it and do not subtract from it (Devarim 13:1), and the Sifrei applies the pasuk directly to *lulav*. The Gemara distinguishes between an addition that changes the prescribed object itself and an extra item that stands separately, -האי לחודיה קאי והאי לחודיה קאי - *this stands by itself and that stands by itself* (Sanhedrin 88b). The Rambam therefore states simply אין פוחתין מהן ואין מוסיפין עליהן - *one may neither subtract from the four species nor add to them* (Hilchos Lulav 7:5).

One Mitzvah of Four Species. The first shared law is that the four species are indispensable to one another: -ארבעה מינין שבלולב מעכבין זה את זה - *the four species of the lulav are indispensable to one another* (Menachos 27a). Chazal derive this from -ולקחתם - *and you shall take*, understood as -ולקחתם תמה - *a complete taking*. If one species is missing, the obligation cannot be fulfilled with the remaining three, although the Raavad permits taking those available, without a bracha, as a remembrance of the mitzvah. The Rambam captures the unity of the command: -ארבעה מינין אלו מצוה אחת הן - *these four species are one mitzvah, are indispensable to one another, and together are called the mitzvah of lulav* (Hilchos Lulav 7:5-6).

Must they also be taken simultaneously? The Gemara says -לא שנו אלא שאין לו - *this was taught only where he does not have all four; if he has them, they do not impede one another* (Menachos 27a). Behag understands that if all four are available they may be taken successively. Rabbeinu Tam requires them to be taken together, although they need not be physically bound. The Rambam and Shulchan Aruch follow Behag. The Chelkas Yoav nevertheless argues that *lechatchilah* the Torah contemplates a simultaneous taking, while *bedieved* successive taking suffices. He points to the Gemara's question -הא מדאגבדיה נפק ביה - *does he not fulfill the mitzvah as soon as he lifts it?* (Sukkah 42a). If simultaneous taking were indispensable even *bedieved*, the Gemara could simply have answered that the *lulav* had been lifted without the *esrog*.

What Counts as Taking. The Torah says -ולקחתם - *and you shall take* (Vayikra 23:40). Does this require an affirmative act of taking, or can the continuing state of holding the species itself count as *lekichah*? The question matters if one picked them up before dawn and continued holding them after dawn, or if legal ownership became complete only after they were already in his hand. R. Mordechai Friedburg and R. Elazar Moshe of Pinsk compare the law of receiving the blood of a korban, where the Torah says -ולקח הכהן מדם - *the kohen shall take some of the blood of the sin-offering with his finger* (Vayikra 4:25). If a monkey placed the blood into the kohen's hand, the kohen would still have to perform a new act of taking (Zevachim 14a). The word *lekichah* therefore suggests an act, not merely possession.

A related question is whether one must actually raise the Four Species from where they rest or whether grasping them in place is enough. The majority of the Acharonim require an actual lifting; R. Moshe ben Chaviv writes that *lechatchilah* they should be raised three *tefachim* and certainly at least one. The Gemara also asks whether -לקיחה על ידי דבר אחר שמה לקיחה - *taking through another object is still called taking*. Rava answers that it can be, provided it is -בדרך בזיון - *in a respectful manner*, rather than -בדרך כבוד - *in a degrading manner* (Sukkah 42a). The Chasam Sofer explains the underlying distinction: -לקיחה על ידי דבר אחר שמה לקיחה אבל נגיעה על ידי דבר אחר לאו שמה - *taking through another object is still taking, but touching through another object is not touching*. *Lekichah* is an act accomplished through a person's power and control, so a respectful intermediary need not destroy the act. [CS: The Mishnah Berurah rules that if gloves or a ring intervened, one should take the *minim* again without a berachah (651:33, 36).]

Binding and Holding the Species. The *lulav* with its *hadasim* and *aravos* is held in the right hand and the *esrog* in the left, because the right hand carries three mitzvah-elements while the left carries one. R. Yehudah holds that the three species require an indispensable binding; the Chachamim disagree, and the Gemara concludes -לולב מצוה לאגוד ואם לא אגוד כשר - *it is a mitzvah to bind the lulav, but if it was not bound it is still valid*. The binding is an expression of -זה אלי ואנוהו - *this is my G-d and I will beautify Him* (Sukkah 11b; Shemos 15:2). The accepted practice is three ties, one joining the species and two

higher on the *lulav*. [CS: If the *lulav* and *esrog* were taken together in one hand, the Mishnah Berurah rules that on the first day they should be taken again properly, without another berachah (651:15).]

The Time and Place of the Mitzvah. Outside the Mikdash the Torah obligation is one day, וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בְּיוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן *you shall take for yourselves on the first day*, while in the Mikdash it applies for seven, וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם לִפְנֵי ה' *you shall rejoice before Hashem your G-d for seven days* (Vayikra 23:40). After the destruction, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai instituted taking the *lulav* everywhere for seven days *as a remembrance of the Mikdash* (Sukkah 41a). The Rishonim dispute whether Yerushalayim itself has the status of Mikdash for this purpose. Rashi treats it as the rest of the country; the Rambam is understood to include Yerushalayim within Mikdash. R. Yaakov Ettlinger therefore concludes that according to the Rambam the Torah obligation of *lulav* applies all seven days in Yerushalayim even in our time (Bikurei Yaakov 658:1).

The people of Yerushalayim expressed the mitzvah in another way. כך היה *this was the custom of the people of Yerushalayim: a man left his home with his lulav in hand*. He went to shul with it, recited Shema and davened with it, and carried it as he went about his day, setting it aside only when necessary (Sukkah 41b). The *lulav* was not merely taken once; it accompanied the day as a beloved mitzvah.

In the Way They Grow. The Four Species must be taken *in the manner of their growth*. Chazal formulate the broader rule *with these mitzvos one fulfills the obligation only in the way the object grows* (Sukkah 45b). Their bases must therefore be below and their tops above. For the *esrog*, the halachic orientation follows the way it initially grows: the stem end is below and the upper end above. One who reverses it does not fulfill the mitzvah.

The Blessing and the Wavings. The bracha presents a familiar difficulty. כל *for all mitzvos the bracha is recited immediately before performance*. Yet *once he has lifted the lulav he has already fulfilled the mitzvah* (Sukkah 42a). The Rishonim therefore discuss taking the *lulav* before the *esrog*, holding one species upside down until after the bracha, or, as the Gra advises, expressly intending not to fulfill the mitzvah until the bracha has been recited. The initial taking is followed by the *na'anuim*. The Mishnah says that Beis Hillel waved at כי טוב *and the Holy One, blessed be He, rejoiced* (Sukkah 37b). R. Yochanan explains *מוליך ומביא למי שהארבע רוחות שלו מעלה ומוריד למי שהשמים והארץ שלו* *one moves them outward and inward for the One to Whom the four directions belong, and raises and lowers them for the One to Whom heaven and earth belong*. There is also a striking *remez* in *David and all the House of Israel rejoiced before Hashem with musical instruments and menaaneim* (II Shmuel 6:5). A Midrash cited in this connection explains זה *this is the lulav that a person waves in his hand* (see Etz HaSadeh 650:1).

Lachem: The Requirement of Ownership. The word *לכם* *for yourselves* teaches *it must be your own*. Thus *לכם משלכם להוציא את השאול ואת* *your own property, excluding a borrowed or stolen lulav* (Sukkah 43a). A jointly owned *esrog* likewise cannot be used on the first day unless each partner receives full ownership of the shares of the others. Where one *esrog* served an entire community, it therefore had to pass from person to person as a genuine gift.

The classic case is the voyage of Rabban Gamliel, R. Yehoshua, R. Elazar ben Azaryah, and R. Akiva, when only Rabban Gamliel possessed a *lulav*. After taking it he gave it to R. Yehoshua, who passed it to R. Elazar ben Azaryah, then to R. Akiva, who returned it to Rabban Gamliel. The Gemara derives from the return that *a gift given on condition that it be returned is legally a gift*. The recipient is owner for the mitzvah, but the condition requires the object ultimately to return. [CS: For a jointly owned set, the Mishnah Berurah says it is preferable to state expressly that each partner gives his share as a *matanah al menas lehachzir* (658:32).]

The requirement of ownership brings the laws of *kinyan* directly into the mitzvah. The Machaneh Ephraim raised a particularly sharp problem: if a person buys an *esrog* but will pay only after Sukkos, has he acquired it on the Torah level? He reasoned that *אין קונה אלא מדרבנן דבר תורה מעות* *meshichah acquires only rabbinically, while by Torah law money effects the purchase*. If *requires Torah-level ownership*, a merely rabbinic acquisition might seem insufficient. The Acharonim give several reasons not to treat this as a practical obstacle, and the conclusion is מצד הדין *strictly speaking, there is no concern*. [CS: The Mishnah Berurah says that *lechatchilah* the *esrog* should be paid for before Yom Tov (658:10).]

Hadar: Beauty as a Requirement. The Torah calls the *esrog* פרי עץ הדר *the fruit of a hadar tree* (Vayikra 23:40). Chazal interpret the phrase in several ways, including *פרי עץ שטעם עץ ופריו שוה* *a fruit whose tree and fruit have the same taste*, and *הדר באילנו משנה לשנה* *it dwells on its tree from year to year* (Sukkah 35a). But *hadar* is also a halachic quality of beauty and wholeness. It is more than the general obligation of *beautify the mitzvah*: here beauty enters the Torah's definition of a valid species. Thus dryness, loss of the top, and other defects may invalidate because the object no longer possesses the required *hadar*. The precise rules differ among the four species and, on the later days, some defects are treated more leniently.

The Lulav. The Torah calls the *lulav* כפת תמרims *branches of date palms* (Vayikra 23:40). The Gemara understands *as a palm branch capable of being brought together*: *if it has separated, bind it* (Sukkah 32a). A hardened palm branch whose leaves can no longer be joined therefore does not fit the Torah's description. The special laws of the *lulav* concern the integrity of its leaves, spine, and uppermost growth, particularly the *tiyomes*. [CS: The Mishnah Berurah notes that a split in only a minority of the central leaf does not invalidate the *lulav*; the concern is when most of it is split (645:16).]

[CS: Rav Moshe Feinstein ruled that the Canary-palm *lulav* is invalid, writing *it is clear that this is not one of the species of lulav* (Igros Moshe, O.C. IV:123). Some poskim disagree.] This reflects a broader botanical question: does *require a branch of the fruit-bearing date palm itself, or is a closely resembling palm species sufficient?*

The Hadas. The *hadas* is ענף עץ עבת *a branch of a thick-leaved tree* (Vayikra 23:40). The Gemara identifies it as *a tree whose leaves cover its stem*, and defines *by the arrangement* *three leaves stand together at one level* (Sukkah 32b). If two are level and the third begins above them, the branch is not fully *avos* and is called a *hadas shoteh*. The Rema records an older practice of relying on less regular formations, but later Acharonim strongly questioned that leniency. [The Mishnah Berurah prefers a fully *meshulash hadas*; *bedieved*, it is sufficient if the leaves are properly *meshulash* over most of the minimum kosher length of the *hadas* (646:15, 18).]

[CS: It is reported from Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach that the three leaf-stems need not emerge at mathematically identical heights. If a horizontal line around the branch would intersect all three stems, the formation can still be considered *meshulash*.] The halachah requires three *hadasim*. Their minimum length, like that of the *aravos*, is three *tefachim*.

The Aravah. *willows of the brook* identifies a particular species, not every plant growing beside water. The Gemara gives its signs *קנה שלה* *its stem is red, its leaf elongated, and its edge smooth* (Sukkah 34a). The Rambam emphasizes that the species remains valid even when it grows in a desert or on a mountain; the similar *tzafzafah* is invalid. The halachah requires two *aravos*. Their minimum length is three *tefachim*, while the spine of the *lulav* must be four so that it rises a *tefach* above the *hadasim* and *aravos*.

The Esrog and Its Identity. The Ramban explains that *פרי עץ הדר* *fruit of the hadar tree* was not a riddle from which Chazal had to discover which fruit the Torah meant. The identity of the *esrog* was received by mesorah; the familiar derashos, such as *פרי עץ שטעם עץ ופריו שוה* *a fruit whose tree and*

fruit have the same taste, and *הדר באילנו משנה לשנה - it remains on its tree from year to year*, support that received identification. הן אסמכתות שעשו *they are supports that our Sages gave for their received tradition* (Ramban, Vayikra 23:40).

The Rambam makes the same point explicitly. Chazal did not begin by wondering whether the Torah meant a pomegranate, quince, or some other fruit and then identify the *esrog* through deduction. עד ראינו בלא ספק מיהושע *we see without doubt that from Yehoshua until now the esrog was taken with the lulav every year, without dispute*. They then *sought the allusion in the written Torah to the received interpretation* (Rambam, Introduction to the Mishnah). The derashah explains the mesorah; it does not create it.

Special Disqualifications of the Esrog. The *esrog* has a particularly detailed body of law governing missing flesh, cracking, discoloration, loss of the *pitom* or stem, and other defects. The Mishnah also invalidates an *esrog* of *orlah* or impure *terumah*. The Gemara gives two explanations: לפי שאין בה *because there is no lawful right to eat it*, and לפי שאין בה דין ממון *because it lacks the monetary ownership required by lachem* (Sukkah 35a). The discussion shows that כללם is not always satisfied by bare physical possession; the owner may need a legally usable interest in the fruit. [CS: The small black specks commonly found on contemporary *esrogim* are generally specks of dirt or pesticides rather than the discoloration that invalidates an *esrog* – see sources in Halachipedia "Etrog" FN5.]

Grafted Esrogim. A major question in the later literature is the *esrog hamurkav*, an *esrog* grafted with lemon or another species. Maharam Alshich, the Rema, Levush, and major later poskim invalidate it. R. Shmuel Yehudah Katzenellenbogen records that once in Padua the entire community had only a single kosher *esrog*. Even after students seized it while it was being sent from the Ashkenazic to the Italian community, the community redeemed it at great expense ולא רצה לצאת במורכבים אשר רבו כמו רובו בכל בתי *and would not rely on the grafted esrogim that were abundant in the gardens of the nobles*.

Several explanations were offered for the invalidity. Grafting itself may involve an aveirah; the grafted branch may become halachically subordinate to the host tree; part of the fruit may be viewed as lemon rather than *esrog*; and the defining quality *פרי עץ שטעם עץ ופריו שוה - a fruit whose tree and fruit have the same taste* may be lacking. Some authorities went so far as to invalidate even an *esrog* merely suspected of grafting. Others argued at length for validation even of fruit certainly known to be grafted, answering these objections one by one. [CS: The Mishnah Berurah treats an *esrog hamurkav* as invalid even in a pressing circumstance, because it is regarded as not the required species (649:46, 53).] The later bans on Corfu *esrogim* because of anti-Jewish persecution on the island should not be confused with this separate halachic question of grafting.

The Size of the Esrog. R. Meir and R. Yehudah dispute the minimum size of an *esrog*: *כאגוז - the size of a nut*, or *כביצה - the size of an egg* (Mishnah Sukkah 3:7). The halachah follows R. Yehudah. The Chasam Sofer makes an unusual point: this is not simply another application of the later numerical dispute over the volume of a *kebeitzah*. תמיד השיעור שנקרא בשם פרי הוא כביצה *the measure that qualifies as a fruit is always the size of an egg of that time*. The issue is the natural stage at which the *esrog* itself has matured into a fruit. At the upper end, the halachah follows R. Yosi that there is no maximum size.

Conclusion. The Four Species begin with four familiar objects, yet their laws reach into some of the broadest areas of halachah: theft and *mitzvat haba'ah ba'veirah, bal tosif*, the meaning of *lekichah*, ownership and acquisition, *hadar*, botanical identity, and the relationship between mesorah and derashah. The Pri Megadim therefore cautions that rulings concerning the fitness of an *esrog* demand particular care, invoking the warning המורים *those who issue rulings are many, but those who truly know are few*. The very precision of the details reveals how much halachic

structure is contained within the seemingly simple command *ולקחתם לכם - you shall take for yourselves*.

The Jugglers: Roots in the Soil, Eyes on the Stars

How to Breathe Eternity in a Worn-Out World

By Rabbi YY Jacobson

A comedian once shared: I went into a store and bought eight oranges. The clerk asked whether I wanted a bag. I said, No, I juggle. But I only juggle eight. If you ever see me buying nine, bag them up. Each year on Sukkos, during the days of the Beis HaMikdash, Jerusalem witnessed one of the most extraordinary celebrations in Jewish life, the Simchas Beis Hashoevah. Throughout the year, the daily offerings were accompanied by wine poured on the Altar. On Sukkos, water was poured as well. Each night, the water-drawing was preceded by an all-night celebration in the Temple courtyard, with music, singing, dancing, and enormous lamps illuminating Jerusalem. At daybreak, a procession descended to the Shiloach Spring to draw the water.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanania recalled that during the days of the water-drawing, our eyes saw no sleep. The Mishnah famously declares that one who never witnessed the Simchas Beis Hashoevah never witnessed true joy. Yet the Mishnah singles out one unusual feature of these celebrations. The chassidim v'anshei maaseh, the pious and men of great deeds, would dance while juggling flaming torches. The Gemara describes Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, the Nasi and leader of the Jewish people, juggling eight burning torches without one touching another.

Why did the Mishnah consider this worth recording? Singing and dancing are obvious expressions of joy. But why juggling, and why should one of the greatest sages and leaders of Israel perform it?

The question becomes even more striking when we discover that juggling appears repeatedly among the sages of the Talmud. Levi juggled eight knives before Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi. Shmuel juggled eight cups of wine before King Shapur. Abaye juggled eight eggs before Rabbah. Rabbi Shmuel bar Yitzchak would dance before a bride while juggling three hadasim. Rabbi Zeira initially criticized him for conduct that seemed beneath his dignity, but after Rabbi Shmuel bar Yitzchak's death, when a pillar of fire separated his bier from the people, Rabbi Zeira recognized the spiritual greatness embodied in that very behavior. Why were some of the greatest sages also jugglers?

The Story of Life. During a Sukkos address in 1957, the Lubavitcher Rebbe offered a beautiful explanation. Juggling, he suggested, gives physical expression to the meaning of life and to the secret of genuine joy.

We often say that we have too many balls in the air. Life itself is a juggling act. We juggle work, family, obligations, pressures, worries, and responsibilities. But Judaism asks us to juggle something more: torches of fire.

ה' נשמת אדם - the soul of man is the lamp of Hashem (Mishlei 20:27).

Each of us carries a flame within. The soul contains light, warmth, passion, and the capacity to illuminate the world around it.

At times, the torch must be thrown upward. A person needs moments when the soul can rise above the pressures and burdens of ordinary existence and reconnect with its source. We need time for Torah, tefillah, reflection, and simply being present before Hashem. The world calls this downtime.

Judaism might call it uptime: moments when the soul is allowed to soar.

But the torch cannot remain in the air. It must come down. We cannot live permanently above the world; our task is to bring the light of the soul into the world. The spiritual experience must return to family, work, relationships, responsibilities, and the ordinary details of life.

That is the art of juggling: one torch ascends while another descends. One part of the person remains rooted above, while another enters fully into life below. Then the roles reverse. We rise in order to return refreshed, and we return in order to elevate the world around us.

Yaakov Avinu's ladder captured the same idea: מוצב ארצה וראשו מגיע השמימה - standing on the earth, with its top reaching heaven. A Jew must be firmly

planted in this world while remaining attached to something beyond it. We cannot become swallowed by the anxieties and pressures of ordinary life, but neither may we escape into spirituality and abandon our responsibilities. Reb Yitzchak of Vorka was once asked what it means to be a Jew. He answered that it means to dance while sitting still, to cry out while remaining silent, and to be alone even among a thousand people. The Jew lives simultaneously in more than one dimension.

The Integrated Soul. This is why juggling belonged at the heart of the Simchas Beis Hashoevah. True joy requires integration. If I remain entirely below, absorbed in the daily grind, I become depleted. If I remain entirely above, detached from human responsibility, I have abandoned my mission. Happiness comes from learning to move between the two without losing either.

The great sages were the master jugglers because this balance demands spiritual discipline. Some people would gladly escape upward and never return. Others become so entangled in the pressures of life that they forget how to rise. The chassid, the spiritually integrated person, knows how to do both: to ascend without escaping, and to descend without becoming trapped. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, the leader of Israel, therefore stood before the nation juggling flames. A true Jewish leader must be completely present among his people without becoming consumed by the pettiness and darkness of the world. He remains connected to Heaven while dealing with earth. He brings light downward without allowing the darkness below to extinguish the flame above.

That is the life of a Jew. Roots in the soil, eyes on the stars. One torch rising, another descending, and through the movement between them, the world itself begins to shine.

Sources: Mishnah and Gemara, Sukkah 51a-53a; Kesuvos 17a. The Lubavitcher Rebbe's explanation appears in Sichos Kodesh 5718 and Toras Menachem 5718, vol. 21. For other explanations of the juggling, see Chasdei David to Tosefta Sukkah ch. 4; Iyun Yaakov and Yefeh Anaf to Ein Yaakov, Sukkah; and Aruch LaNer, Sukkah.
[Slightly condensed for space constraints]

The Truth About Schach Mats

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question: We arrived at a communally available sukkah and discovered that the schach is a mat made of wooden slats held together with ordinary string. May we use it?

Question: May polyester thread be used to tie down schach? I have heard conflicting opinions.

Question: Did Rav Moshe Feinstein permit venetian blinds for schach? Schach mats have become extremely common, but depending on how they are manufactured, they may raise several halachic questions. To understand them, we must first review the basic requirements of schach. Schach must come from vegetative material that has been detached from the ground, is not food, and is not a kli, an item susceptible to tumah. The detailed laws of kabbalas tumah are complex, but for our purposes the central question is whether processing a natural material can turn it into something halachically considered a utensil and therefore invalid as schach.

The Original Schach Mats. The Mishnah (Sukkah 19b) discusses mats made of reeds. A mat intended for sleeping, sitting, or lying upon is susceptible to tumah and is invalid as schach. The Gemara (20a) concludes that small reed mats are presumed to have been made for sleeping and therefore may not be used as schach unless they were manufactured specifically for roofing. Larger mats, which were less commonly used for sleeping, are presumed acceptable unless it is known that they were made for that purpose.

This issue remains relevant to modern schach mats. Years ago, a distributor asked me to provide a hechsher for large mats made in China from split bamboo tied together with nylon thread. Two separate problems arose. First, bamboo mats in China are commonly used for sitting or sleeping. The rishonim disagree whose intent controls the status of a mat manufactured for

sale. Rabbi Yeshayah of Trani holds that the purchaser's intended use determines its status. According to this view, mats specially ordered for schach would be acceptable. The Rosh (Sukkah 1:37), however, rules that in a place where mats are normally manufactured for sleeping, even a mat specifically ordered for schach is invalid because of a rabbinic concern that ordinary sleeping mats might then be used as schach.

To avoid the issue, I advised the distributor to have the factory weave, at six-inch intervals, pieces of bamboo too thick to permit the mat to be used comfortably for sleeping. The mat would then clearly be manufactured only for roofing purposes.

The second problem involved the nylon thread. Nylon does not grow from the ground and cannot itself serve as schach. The question therefore becomes whether the material holding schach together must itself be valid schach.

Ma'amid Bedavar HaMekabel Tumah. The Mishnah records a dispute concerning schach resting on bedposts. The Tanna Kamma validates the sukkah, while Rabbi Yehudah invalidates it. According to one explanation in the Gemara, Rabbi Yehudah's concern is that the ma'amid, the material supporting and holding the schach in place, is susceptible to tumah.

Rashi explains that supporting schach with material susceptible to tumah resembles using such material as schach itself. Some authorities understand this concern as potentially de'Oraisa, while most understand it as a rabbinic safeguard lest one eventually use invalid material for the schach itself.

Although most major rishonim permit a sukkah whose schach is supported by material that is invalid for schach, later authorities generally follow the Magen Avraham (629:9): the sukkah is kosher, but lechatchilah one should support the schach with material that itself qualifies as schach. Thus, if one visits a sukkah whose schach rests directly on metal, the sukkah may still be used, assuming it is otherwise kosher, even though it ideally should not have been constructed that way.

Rav Shmuel Vosner adds an important point. He understands the concern with ma'amid to extend not only to material susceptible to tumah but to anything that itself is invalid as schach (Shevet HaLevi 6:74).

The Strings Holding a Mat Together. A schach mat necessarily requires some material to hold its pieces together. Several authorities rule that where the mat would fall apart or not remain on the sukkah without those strings, the strings themselves constitute a ma'amid (Shevet HaLevi 6:74; Yechaveh Daas 1:64).

The status of the string depends in part on its material and processing. Wool cannot be used as schach because it does not grow from the ground. Linen thread is susceptible to tumah. Chazal also prohibited partially processed flax as schach (Sukkah 12b).

The rishonim offer several explanations for the prohibition of processed flax. The Rambam explains that after processing it no longer appears to have grown from the ground. The Raavad connects the prohibition to its use for stuffing pillows and consequent susceptibility to tumah. Tosafos explains that because it is close to becoming finished linen thread, Chazal already treated it like thread.

The difference is important. According to the first approaches, similar concerns can apply to processed cotton, hemp, jute, and other fibers. According to Tosafos's explanation, the specific rabbinic prohibition may be limited to flax. The Mishnah Berurah (629:12) therefore rules stringently that thread of any material should not itself be used as schach.

But a thread used only to hold a mat together is not the schach itself; it is a ma'amid. That leaves room for greater leniency. The Ritva indicates that the concern with ma'amid may apply only where the supporting material is invalid as schach min haTorah. Material prohibited only miderabbanan may therefore be less problematic, although the Pri Megadim expresses greater concern.

This distinction lies behind a disagreement concerning modern schach mats. Rav Ovadia Yosef was asked about mats tied with cotton twine and ruled that they may be used lechatchilah. Although cotton thread may itself be rabbinically invalid as schach, its use merely as a ma'amid is sufficiently removed from the original prohibition.

Rav Vosner was asked about a mat tied with nylon. Because nylon is synthetic and cannot qualify as schach at all, and because the mat would not remain intact without it, he regarded the nylon as an improper ma'amid. He therefore ruled that such a mat should not be used lechatchilah, although a sukkah roofed with it remains kosher.

This also explains the practical question about polyester thread. If the schach will remain securely in place without being tied, the thread is not supporting it in the same sense. But if the schach would otherwise fall or blow off, polyester or other synthetic thread becomes the ma'amid and should not be used lechatchilah. Cotton or another natural fiber is preferable. Rav Ovadia Yosef considers cotton acceptable lechatchilah; even those who are more stringent would generally regard it as preferable to synthetic cord. Some certified schach mats avoid these concerns by using coarse bamboo that is clearly unsuitable for sleeping together with coarse natural twine that has not been spun into ordinary thread. Such construction avoids both the question of a sleeping mat and the problem of an invalid ma'amid.

What About Venetian Blinds? Rav Moshe Feinstein is sometimes quoted as permitting wooden venetian blinds for schach. In fact, he ruled the opposite. In Rav Moshe's time, venetian blinds consisted of wooden slats held together by cloth. In Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 1:177, he discusses a question that arose through Rav Shimshon Zelig Fortman concerning wooden boards and venetian blinds. Rav Moshe distinguishes between ordinary boards that may, under certain circumstances, be usable for schach and venetian blinds. The blinds themselves, he rules, are susceptible to tumah and therefore invalid as schach min haTorah. Even removing the wooden slats from the completed blinds does not make them valid. Thus, Rav Moshe discusses venetian blinds, but unquestionably prohibits their use as schach.

Can Improper Use Invalidate a Mat? Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank addressed an unusual case involving mats manufactured specifically for schach. Their owner instructed movers not to use them for any other purpose. The movers nevertheless used them to pack glassware. Since mats used for storage can acquire the status of utensils and become invalid for schach, the owner asked whether the movers had ruined them.

Rav Frank ruled that the mats remained kosher. When an owner expressly limits an object's use, another person's unauthorized use does not override the owner's designation. The mats therefore retained their status as schach.

Conclusion. Schach mats can raise several independent questions: whether the mat was manufactured for sleeping or another utensil-like purpose, whether the material binding it together serves as a ma'amid, and whether that binding material is itself acceptable for supporting schach. These concerns can be avoided by purchasing mats with reliable halachic certification.

The broader lesson is that the laws of schach are more intricate than they initially appear. A sukkah that looks perfectly ordinary may involve questions that are not obvious to the layperson. It is therefore worthwhile to have someone knowledgeable in Hilchos Sukkah inspect a sukkah before Yom Tov, particularly when its construction or schach is unusual.

Wishing everyone a chag kosher v'sameach

[Slightly condensed for space constraints]

Rav Kook on Sukkot and the Land of Israel

Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>

From the introduction to **Eitz Hadar**

In 1907, Rav Kook published Eitz Hadar, a halachic work devoted to etrogim grown in Eretz Yisrael and the problem of grafted etrogim. He also saw the use of Israeli etrogim as a way for Jews throughout the world to strengthen their connection to Eretz Yisrael and support its developing Jewish communities.

Underlying Connections. Our world is an alma d'peruda, a reality divided into seemingly conflicting realms: physical and spiritual, secular and holy, compassion and strict justice. Yet beneath these divisions lies an underlying unity, a shared point that connects what appears separate. This principle,

emphasized in the Torah's inner teachings, provides a deeper way of understanding the world.

The Sages teach in Kiddushin 36b that mitzvos fall into two broad categories. Some are mitzvos hateluyos ba'aretz, obligations dependent upon the Land, such as Shemitah and ma'asros. Others, such as Shabbos, tefillah, and Torah study, apply even outside Eretz Yisrael. What connects these two categories?

The Ramban, in his commentary to Bereishis 26:5 and Devarim 11:18, explains that the ultimate root of all mitzvos is Eretz Yisrael. Even mitzvos observed in exile preserve the spiritual identity of the Jewish people so that, upon returning to their Land, they will continue their ancient way of life rather than begin anew. The Sifrei makes the point explicitly: אף על פי שאני - מגלה אתכם מן הארץ לחוצה לארץ היו מצוינים במצוות שכשתחזור לא יהו עליכם חדשים - Even when I exile you from the Land, remain distinguished through mitzvos, so that when you return they will not be new to you.

Thus, even mitzvos that apply everywhere retain an inner connection to Eretz Yisrael.

Rav Kook compares this to the role of land in material life. A nation may express itself through culture, art, wisdom, and science, but all of these ultimately require a physical foundation in land. Land is like the root of a tree. The roots may seem lowly compared with the beauty of the branches and fruit, but without them nothing can grow. So too in the spiritual realm: the rich world of mitzvos is ultimately rooted in the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael.

The Four Species. Is there one mitzvah that visibly unites these two categories? Rav Kook finds it in the arba'ah minim. The mitzvah is a personal obligation incumbent upon a Jew wherever he lives, yet its very objects evoke Eretz Yisrael, its vegetation, harvest, and fruit: ולקחתם לכם ביום - הראשון פרי עץ הדר כפת תמרין וענף עץ עבת וערבי נחל - You shall take for yourselves a beautiful fruit, a palm branch, myrtle branches, and willows of the brook (Vayikra 23:40).

Indeed, Sukkos as a whole is closely connected with Eretz Yisrael and the harvest. The Sages taught that the calendar may be adjusted so that Sukkos occurs during the harvest season (Sifrei 192). The connection is particularly evident in the etrog. Rambam suggests that one reason the Torah selected this fruit was its availability in Eretz Yisrael (Moreh Nevuchim 3:43).

In exile, by contrast, obtaining an etrog was often difficult and expensive. That difficulty itself could deepen the Jew's longing for Eretz Yisrael, a land naturally suited to the fulfillment of the mitzvah. After the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai specifically extended the taking of the arba'ah minim throughout the seven days of Sukkos as a zecher laMikdash, commemorating their seven-day use in the Mikdash (Rosh Hashanah 30a).

Etrogim and Settling the Land. Rav Kook was deeply concerned with the widespread use of grafted etrogim, which are not valid for the mitzvah. He therefore encouraged the development of reliable etrog orchards in Eretz Yisrael. Purchasing properly supervised Israeli etrogim could accomplish two purposes at once: enabling Jews to fulfill the mitzvah properly while supporting Jewish agriculture and settlement in the Land.

For Rav Kook, this was more than an economic preference. The etrog itself joins together two dimensions of Jewish life. It is a mitzvah incumbent upon every Jew, wherever he lives, yet it naturally turns his attention toward Eretz Yisrael. By choosing the produce of the Land, the mitzvah becomes not only a remembrance of Eretz Yisrael but a concrete way of participating in its rebuilding.

In this way, the arba'ah minim embody Rav Kook's larger vision. What appears divided is ultimately connected. The mitzvos of exile point toward Eretz Yisrael; the spiritual life of the Jewish people is rooted in its Land; and even a single etrog can join personal avodas Hashem with the rebuilding of the Jewish homeland.

Adapted from the introduction to Rav Kook's Eitz Hadar, as presented in Silver from the Land of Israel.

[Slightly condensed for space constraints]

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In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

SUKKOT: To KNOW, or to REMEMBER

Wouldn't make more sense to celebrate Sukkot during the month of Nisan instead of Tishrei?

After all, this is the holiday that commemorates our dwelling in 'booths' in the desert after we left Egypt, and it was in the month of Nisan that we first set up camp in the desert! In fact, Sukkot was even the name of Bnei Yisrael's very first camp-site, during that first week of the Exodus, as Sefer Shmot records:

"And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Sukkot, about six hundred thousand men on foot, beside children..." (see Shmot 12:37-39 / note as well that it was in the camp site of Succot when they first baked matza!)

Furthermore, the sole pasuk in Chumash that explains the historical reason for this holiday emphasizes how we must thank God for His special protection and care in the desert immediately after the Exodus:

"You shall sit in **sukkot** for seven days... in order that future generations may **know** that I made Bnei Yisrael dwell in **sukkot** when I brought them out of Egypt..." (see Vayikra 23:42-43).

Pay attention, however, to the special wording of this pasuk - for it doesn't command us to 'remember' (what happened in the desert), rather - we are commanded to '**know**' ['lema'an **yeid'u** doroteichem'] / as opposed to 'lema'an tizkeru']!

In the following shiur, we will show how this distinction can help us better understand the historical reason for the holiday of Sukkot, and appreciate why the Torah instructs us celebrate this holiday specifically during the autumn harvest season [i.e. to coincide with the agricultural holiday of "chag ha-asif"].

INTRODUCTION

As you probably recall, we find both an historical reason, as well as an agricultural reason for each of the three 'pilgrimage holidays' [the 'shalosh regalim']:

- In the beginning of the **spring** ['chag ha-aviv'] we celebrate our Exodus from Egypt = 'chag ha-matzot'
- During the **grain harvest** ['chag ha-katzir'] we celebrate the giving of the Torah = 'chag shavu'ot'
- During the **fruit harvest** [chag ha-asif] we celebrate our dwelling in 'booths' in the desert = chag ha-sukkot.

Now the reason why we are commanded to 'remember the Exodus' in the spring is simple - it's because that event took place in the spring (see Devarim 16:1). Similarly, we received the Torah in the month of Sivan, hence we are to commemorate that event seven weeks later - on "Shavuot".

However, there doesn't appear to be any obvious reason for celebrating 'our dwelling in booths in the desert' specifically in Tishrei. After all, this holiday does not commemorate a single event, but rather an entire time period of our national history - that spanned over forty years. So what makes Tishrei special?

In fact, it might have made more sense to commemorate 'our dwelling in sukkot' in Nissan - together with our commemoration of the Exodus. Certainly, both events are related (and as we explained earlier that Sukkot was first mentioned in Chumash when we left Egypt /see Shmot 12:37 & 13:20!).

Nevertheless, the Torah insists that we commemorate our 'desert experience' six months later, in the month of Tishrei (a month that certainly doesn't lack holidays), and specifically at the time of our grain harvest.

To explain why, we begin with a general distinction which relates to the historical reason for celebrating all of the holidays.

REMEMBERING 'WHAT', OR REMEMBERING 'WHY'

We posit that when Torah instructs us to remember a certain key historical event, God is not interested that we simply remember **what** happened, rather it is more important that we remember **why** that event took place.

[Recall that in our shiur on chag ha-matzot / Parshat Bo, we applied this principle to our understanding of chag ha-matzot and korban pesach; likewise in our shiurim on the underlying reason for the four fast days in Sefer Zecharya.]

Applying this principle to Sukkot, we posit that we don't sit in the sukkah simply to 'remember' [and express thanksgiving] that God provided for our needs during our journey through the desert; rather the Torah commands that we sit in the sukkah in order to remember **why** that entire desert experience was necessary!

Therefore, our shiur will first consider **why** the entire desert experience was necessary. Then, we will show why the summer harvest becomes an ideal time to commemorate that time period of our history. Finally we will explain why we are commanded to **know** these events (not just remember them); and why **seven** days are necessary to accomplish this goal!

LIFE IN THE DESERT - A TRANSITION STAGE

Let's begin by taking a closer look at the Torah's commandment to celebrate Sukkot, noting how the Torah focuses on commemorating the 'desert experience' (and **not** the Exodus itself):

"You shall sit in **sukkot** for seven days... - **in order** that your future generations may know that I made Bnei Yisrael dwell in **sukkot** when I brought them out of Egypt..." (see Vayikra 23:43).

In our shiur on Parshat Beshalach, we explained how Bnei Yisrael's various experiences in the desert [after they left Egypt] could be understood as a 'training' period - initiated by God to help transform this nation of slaves into a nation capable of establishing His model nation in the Promised Land.

Even though this process began with a 'big bang' - i.e. the Ten Plagues, the Exodus, the splitting of Red Sea, etc. - those great miracles were necessary to convince Bnei Yisrael of their total dependence upon God (see shiur on Beshalach). However, that high level of miracles could be considered more of an 'attention getter' than an ideal. Sooner or later, Bnei Yisrael would need to learn to recognize God in their daily lives without the help of miracles. But this required a long 'educational' process that would spiritually prepare them for challenges of daily existence once they would inherit the Land of Israel.

In fact, Moshe Rabbeinu himself provides us with a beautiful explanation of the preparatory nature of the entire 'desert experience'! We need only quote from that speech, delivered to Bnei Yisrael as they prepare to finally enter the land, to understand the purpose of their experiences in the desert:

"All these mitzvot which I command you... keep in order that you live... and inherit the Land..."

remember the way that God has led you during your wanderings of forty years in the **desert** - in order to **test** you with hardships to **know** what is in your hearts; whether you would keep His commandments, or not...

* "He gave you the **manna** to eat... in order to teach you that man does not live on bread alone, **rather** man lives on the words of God..."

've-yada'ta' et levavecha...'.

[In order that] you should **know**, that just as a father puts his son through hardship (to train him), so too has God put you through hardship" (See Devarim 8:1-6).

Note how Moshe explains how the 'manna' served as a 'training' food for Bnei Yisrael, to teach them in the desert that their food comes from God, so that when they enter the land of

Israel - and make their own food - they will remember that God is the underlying source of their sustenance.

To support these introductory remarks, Moshe continues by explaining **why** this 'testing period' was necessary:

"...for God is bringing you into a good land... a land of wheat and barely, vines, figs and pomegranates, of olive trees and honey...a land where you will lack nothing...

* **Be careful**, lest you **forget** God and fail to keep His commandments. Should you eat and become satiated, and build fine **houses** and live in them... and everything you own has prospered...

* **Beware** lest you grow **haughty** and **forget** your God who took you out of Egypt...

* **Lest** you say: My **own** power and my **own** might have won this wealth for me.

* **Remember** that it is the Lord your God who gives you the power to get wealth..." (see Devarim 8:7-19).

It was specifically because daily life in the land of Israel would be without 'obvious miracles' - that this training in the desert was so necessary! As Moshe explains, God is fearful that once Bnei Yisrael cultivate the land and provide for themselves, they may become haughty thinking that 'they did it all themselves' - and hence reminds them how they must always remember 'their lesson' from the desert.

According to Moshe Rabbeinu's speech, this transition period in the desert was necessary to prepare Bnei Yisrael for the spiritual dangers facing their agrarian society, which they are about to establish in the Land of Israel. To recognize the hand of God in a miracle was easy - but to recognize His hand within the nature will be much more difficult.

This background provides us with a very logical reason for the Torah's commandment to celebrate Sukkot on a yearly basis.

As this danger of 'becoming haughty and forgetting God' is so real, it will apply to future generations as well, especially those who never experienced the desert! Hence, the Torah instructs Bnei Yisrael that all future generations must not only remember this 'desert experience', but they must virtually 're-live' [to **know** it] - by living in a sukka for seven days!

THE MOST FITTING TIME OF THE YEAR

This background also explains the 'advantage' of celebrating Sukkot at the conclusion of the harvest season.

If we are sitting in the 'sukka' to remember why that desert experience was necessary - and if that experience was necessary due to the fear of haughtiness that may stem from economic prosperity - then the 'harvest season' [when economic prosperity is at its highest] is the best time to remember those events, for that is when the fear of haughtiness is greatest!

This fear was not only expressed by Moshe Rabbeinu in his speech (as quoted above in 8:3-12), but see also shirat Ha'azinu (see especially 31:16,20 and 32:13-15!). Our own life experience certainly supports the reality of this fear.

Just as dwelling in the desert prepared Bnei Yisrael for their entry into Eretz Yisrael, so too, our sitting in the sukka prepares us for the spiritual challenges that inevitably surface as we gather our produce & reflect on our 'profits' and wealth.

[See Rashbam on Vayikra 23:43, in contrast to the interpretation of Ramban to that pasuk. Our shiur will follow the direction of Rashbam, noting how he also quotes from Devarim chapter 8!]

Therefore, the Torah commands that we celebrate **Sukkot** at the climax of the agricultural year - as we gather the fruits and 'count our wealth'. It is specifically during this time of year that the spiritual dangers of affluence are greatest. At the height of the harvest season, we must not only 'remember' the lesson of that desert experience, we must actually re-live it, or as the Chumash commands us - we must **know** it.

KNOWING SOMETHING - In the Biblical Sense

The Torah's use of the phrase 'lema'an **yeid'u** doroteichem' takes on additional meaning when we consider the deeper meaning of the word 'lada'at' - to **know**. As we all remember, the Torah uses this word to describe the intimate relationship between husband & wife: 've-Adam **yada** et Chava ishto' (see Breishit 4:1). [It is not by chance that this word is also used to describe the Tree of Knowledge - 'etz ha-da'at' in the story of Gan Eden.]

Later on in Sefer Breishit, when God takes a 'close look' at the people of Sedom - to punish them for their terrible sins - this type of intense relationship as well is described with the verb lada'at - see Breishit 18:21, [Note also Breishit 15:8 & 13.]

Similarly, in preparation for the Exodus, God wants to make sure that Bnei Yisrael will internalize the message of '**Ani Hashem**' - that He is their God, and the only God: [See TSC shiur on Parshat Va'era / Ani Hashem.]

To emphasize this commandment, note again how the Torah employs the verb lada'at to describe this intense relationship:

"Therefore, tell Bnei Yisrael that I am God, and I will take them out of..., and save them... and redeem them with an outstretched hand... and take them as My nation and I will be their God ---

"vi-yda'tem ki Ani Hashem Elokeichem"-

In order that you will **know** that I am the God who has taken you out of Egypt" (see Shmot 6:6-7).

In other words, to 'know something' (or someone) in the Bible entails much more the intellectual knowledge. To know - reflects an intense and very close relationship - to internalize that idea.

This can help us appreciate to meaning of 'lema'an **yeid'u** doroteichem' in Vayikra 23:43. We are commanded to sit in the sukka not just to remember what happened, but to **know** it - i.e. to totally identify with the purpose of that 'desert experience' and its eternal message.

Note as well how Moshe Rabbeinu used this very same word when he explained the purpose of the original desert experience:

"And you shall **know** in your hearts..." [that this was a 'training' experience] (see Devarim 8:5).

This also explains the difference between the mitzvot of Pesach and Sukkot. The mitzvot that we observe on Pesach (and chag ha-matzot) are in order to 'remember' [lizkor] what happened (and why), yet we are not commanded to re-live that experience - for it was a 'one-time' event in Jewish history. In contrast, on Sukkot, we must re-live that 'desert experience' for its underlying purpose is no different today than it was back then - to inculcate the eternal message that man should not become haughty at the height of his prosperity.

WHY SEVEN DAYS?

This background can also help us understand why the Torah requires that we sit in the sukka specifically for **seven** days. Note that all the agricultural holidays revolve around the number seven.

* 7 days of chag ha-matzot in the spring;

* 7 weeks until chag ha-shavu'ot;

* 7 days of chag ha-sukkot

As we explained in our shiur on Parshat Breishit [perek aleph], the Torah's description of the story of Creation in **seven** days emphasizes that the creation of what we call **nature** was not by chance, nor a 'balance of powers' among a pantheon of gods, but rather - the willful act of one God, for a purpose. Therefore, each time that **seven** is found in Chumash (e.g. Shabbat etc.), it is to remind us that God is the creator of, and master over, all nature.

Thus, it is only 'natural' that we find the number seven prominent in the agricultural holidays, as we thank God for His providence over nature, and recognize that He is the true source of our prosperity.

FROM SUCCOT TO SHMINI ATZERET

The above interpretation can also help us understand the importance of Shmini Atzeret. As the shalosh regalim come to their conclusion, we add one extra day of celebration, void of any specific mitzva, other than rejoicing with God. Even though it is the 'eighth day' of **Sukkot**, we do not need to sit in the sukka, nor do we need to take the lulav - for the preparatory stage is now over!

On the other hand, we cannot just jump from the desert right back into the Land of Israel. Instead, a time of transition is necessary to wean us from the 'desert environment' back to daily life. [This also emerges as a primary theme in Sefer Yehoshua.]

This may explain why we don't sit in the sukka on this 'final' day of Sukkot, for it represents how we must return to our homes. We keep the essence of our 'desert-like experience' - our closeness to God - and make it the basis of our daily natural existence.

From this perspective, one could suggest that we do not simply **leave** the sukka on **Shmini Atzeret**, rather we bring the sukka into our homes. We then rejoice with the Torah [dancing seven hakafot - just like Yericho!], for its mitzvot - that we received in the desert - enable us to continue the spirit of our 'Sukkot honeymoon' with God throughout the entire year

chag sameiach,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN & some mini-shiurim

A. FROM THE SUKKA TO THE HOUSE

Based on the last point in the above shiur, we can explain our custom on Hoshana Rabba (7th day of Sukkot) afternoon to bring our 'keilim' (vessels) **from** the sukka back **into** the house - in preparation for Shmini Atzeret. This may highlight the primary purpose of this Yom Tov, i.e. to move the spiritual message of the sukka into our homes for the remainder of the year.]

[In a similar manner, the 7 days of Sukkot followed by Shmini Atzeret could be compared to the 7 day milu'im ceremony of the mishkan which was required before the special yom ha-shmini dedication ceremony (see Vayikra 8:1-10:1.). Note the from the eighth day onward, the mishkan became functional, but seven day are necessary as **preparation**. [Note also first mishna in Yoma - 7 days before Yom Kippur, the kohen must prepare himself etc.]]

B. PRI ETZ HADAR

The conclusions of our shiur may shed light on Chazal's explanation of 'pri etz hadar' (see Vayikra 23:40). Rashi quotes two Midrashim for etz hadar:

- 1) A tree that the 'taste of its fruit' is the same as the 'taste of the tree'.
- 2) A fruit that 'dwells on the tree' from year to year.
(see Rashi 23:40 & Masechet Sukka 35a)

The first Midrash is quite difficult for it relates to what Chazal refer to as 'chet ha-aretz' - i.e. the 'original sin' of the land during the process of Creation (see Breishit 1:11 / & Rashi on 'etz pri'). Even though God commanded that the land bring forth an 'etz pri oseh pri' - a fruit tree giving fruit - the land brought forth instead an 'etz oseh pri' - a tree giving fruit. Even though there doesn't seem to be much of a difference between these two expressions, Chazal relate this minute change to the manner by which nature appears to 'hide' God, or act itself as a god.

This is a bit difficult to explain, [and the following is an over simplification of a very complex topic] but in a 'nutshell', when the tree gives fruit every year, it appears that the tree itself creates the fruit. When man contemplates this phenomena in nature, that trees 'on their own' can create fruit, he may conclude that trees have their own power - or that there may be some nature god who 'programs' these trees (how else does it know what fruit to make). In other words, man begins to see various powers within

nature, and relates them to many gods (e.g. fertility gods, rain gods, grain gods, sun gods etc.). This leads man to 'worship' these gods to ensure that nature produces the proper produce and provide a successful harvest.

In contrast to this dangerous misconception, God wants man to realize that there is only **one** God behind nature, even though the way that nature works often leads man to a very different conclusion. [See Rav Yehuda HaLevi's explanation of perek aleph in Breishit and 'shem Elokim' in HaKuzari ma'amar rev'i.]

In contrast to all of the other trees that give fruit according to the standard one year agricultural cycle, the **etrog** tree is very different. Instead of its fruit growing in the spring and harvested in the fall like all other trees, the fruit of the **etrog** can stay on the tree year after year, or as Chazal explain 'ha-dar' - a fruit that **lives** on the tree from year to year ['ha-dar ba-ilan mi-shana le-shana']. This special phenomena sort of 'breaks the rules' of nature - indicating that there must be a higher power above nature! By taking specifically an **etrog** on Sukkot, we take a powerful symbol from nature itself to remind ourselves that God is above nature, and He alone controls it.

C KOHELET & the Harvest Season

Relate the minhag to read Sefer **Kohelet** on Sukkot to above shiur and Devarim 31:7-13 (mitzvat Hakhel). Carefully compare the end of Sefer Kohelet to Devarim 31:12-13! Note also how Kohelet describes the spiritual problems relating to affluence.

D. VE-ACHALTA VE-SAVA'TA - & then what?

Recall how our shiur was based on Devarim chapter 8. In that chapter, review once again 8:10, the famous pasuk that we are learning birkat ha-mazon from, paying careful attention to its context.

Then, review Devarim 31:14-21, noting especially 31:20, and the phrase 've-achal ve-sava...'. Note how these psukim thematically relate to Devarim 32:7-15 in shirat Ha'azinu!

Can you explain the deeper meaning of the contrast between 've-achal ve-sava ve-dashen' and 've-achalta ve-sava'ta u-beirachta'!?

SOME ADDITIONAL MINI-SHIURIM

I. FROM YOM KIPPUR TO SUKKOT

We are all familiar with the custom to begin work on our **sukka** immediately after Yom Kippur. Although this custom is often understood as simply a great way to 'get off to a good start', ['mi-chayil el chayil'], it may also allude to something more significant

First of all, recall that the original Yom Kippur in Chumash was the day that Moshe came down with the second luchot and middot ha-rachamim. Recall as well that with the help of these **middot**, God had agreed to Moshe's plea that He return His **Shchina** to Bnei Yisrael, even though He had taken it away in the aftermath of chet ha-egel / see Shmot 33:1-8). Nonetheless, the **Shchina** itself, even though God promised that it would return, does not return immediately, rather - only some six months later - after Bnei Yisrael build the mishkan (see Shmot 25:8 & Vayikra 9:1-5!).

In fact, immediately after receiving the second luchot, the first thing that Moshe does is gather the people together and charge them with the building of the mishkan (note Parshat Vayakhel). Even though the **Shchina** is returning, Bnei Yisrael must become active in this process; they must do something to 'receive' the **Shchina**. Just like Moshe had to now carve his own **second luchot** [psol **lecha**... / see Shmot 34:1 (in contrast to the first **luchot** which God Himself had carved)], in a similar manner Bnei Yisrael must now become more active and build the mishkan.

The mitzva to build the **sukka** immediately after Yom Kippur may reflect this same idea. Just as Bnei Yisrael began to work on the mishkan after (and as a result of) Yom Kippur, we also begin building our **sukkot** in which can 'meet the **Shchina**' in a manner similar to the purpose of the mishkan.

We can also relate this to PART II of our shiur on Yom Kippur in regard to the deeper meaning of **kappara**.

Recall from our shiur on Yom Kippur that one aspect of kappara was to 'protect' man, allowing him to encounter the **Shchina**. If indeed our kappara on Yom Kippur was successful, then we should now be ready to encounter the **Shchina**. Considering that our sitting under the 'sechach' of the **sukka** symbolizes our sitting under the 'clouds of God's glory' in the desert ["sukkot kenegged ananei ha-kavod" / Sukka 11b], then Yom Kippur could actually be considered a **preparation** for Sukkot! To enable us to 'dwell' together with the **Shchina** in our **sukka**, we must first complete the process of kappara on Yom Kippur.

This thematic connection can help us understand many other halachot and customs of Sukkot.

For example, the gemara in Sukka 5b learns the minimum height of the **sukka** - 10 'tephachim' - from the height of the **kaporet**! [Recall last week's shiur which discussed the significance of the **kaporet** in relation to the **Shchina** / see also complete sugya in Masechet Sukka beginning at the bottom of 4b.] In fact, the same shorsh as 'sechach' is found in the pasuk which describes the **keruvim** on the **kaporet**: 've-hayu ha-keruvim... **sochechim** be-kanfeihem al ha-**kaporet**...' (see Shmot 25:20).

This pasuk clearly shows how the sechach of our **sukka** reflects our dwelling under the **Shchina**.

II. THE DOUBLE MUSSAF ON SUKKOT

In Parshat Pinchas (Bamidbar chps. 28-29) we find a complete list of all the korbanot **mussaf** which we offered in addition to the daily **tamid** offering in the bet ha-mikdash.

If you make a table of the korbanot for each holiday, you will notice an interesting pattern:

On each of the Tishrei holidays (except **Sukkot**), i.e. Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, and Shmini Atzeret, we offer an identical **korban mussaf** - 1 'par', 1 'ayil', and 7 'kevasim'.

On each of the shalosh regalim (except **Sukkot**), i.e. chag ha-matzot and Shavu'ot, we offer an identical **korban mussaf** - 2 parim, 1 ayil, and 7 kevasim.

The **mussaf** of Sukkot is quite different, each day the amount of parim changes (from 13 down to 7), and each day we offer 2 eilim and 14 kevasim! [See Bamidbar 29:12-34.]

The additional parim are the most striking difference, and Chazal explain that these are added for the 70 nations for whom Sukkot is also celebrated (13+12+11+10+9+8+7=70). [See also Zecharya chapter 14, haftara on first day Sukkot.]

However, the extra ayil & kevasim also require explanation.

Note, that they are **double** the number that are offered on all of the other holidays. In other words, instead of 1 ayil we bring 2 eilim; instead of 7 kevasim we bring 14 kevasim. This indicates that there must be something 'double' about Sukkot.

The answer may be quite simple. **Sukkot** is **both** one of the shalosh regalim (see Shmot 23:14-17 & Devarim 16:1-17), and a **Tishrei** holiday as well. Therefore, it requires a **double mussaf**. In other words, it should have daily:

- 3 parim [2+1];
- 2 eilim [1+1];
- 14 kevasim [7+7].

However, we add an additional 49 parim [10+9+8+7+6+5+4] to reach a total of 70 [49+(3x7)=49+21=70], as explained above.

[Again we find 49 [7x7] related to the shalosh regalim.]

This may reflect the double nature of **Sukkot**. On the one hand it is one of the shalosh regalim in which we thank **Hashem** for our harvest of the agricultural year **which has just finished**. At the same time, we stand in anticipation of the agricultural year **which is about to begin**, awaiting its important rainy season (see shiur on Rosh Ha'shana), just as we do on all of the other Tishrei holidays.

This 'double nature' is reflected by the two times in daily davening on **Sukkot** when we hold the lulav & etrog, during:

- 1) **Hallel** - to **thank** God for the harvest of the past year;
- 2) **Hoshanot** - to **pray** to God in anticipation of the **new** Year.

Similarly, this 'double nature' may also reflect the **two** reasons that Chazal [see Sukka 11b] give us for sitting in the **sukka**.

- 1) **sukkot mamash** - real booths, to protect us from the sun.

This may reflect the aspect of the harvest holiday, where we need to build temporary booths in the field as we gather our fruits in the fields.

- 2) **sukkot** kenegged **ananei ha-kavod** - representing God's **Shchina** which protected Bnei Yisrael in the desert.

III. NOT BY CHANCE

Regarding for celebrating each of the shalosh regalim.

In our shiur, we discussed the connection between the historical and agricultural reason for Succot. Now we will discuss that connection in regard to the other two shalosh regalim.

The fact that the Torah provides **two** reasons for celebrating **sukkot** should not surprise us. After all, the other two shalosh regalim - i.e. chag ha-matzot & Shavu'ot - also carry both historical and agricultural perspectives:

Chag ha-matzot not only commemorates the events of the Exodus from Egypt, but also must be celebrated at the onset of the spring. [See Shmot 13:3-4, 23:14-15, & Devarim 16:1-2.] Consequently, on that holiday the Torah commands us to bring the 'omer' offering from the first barley harvest (see Vayikra 23:10-11).

Similarly, even though chag **Shavu'ot** commemorates the historical event of matan Torah, the Torah presents it primarily as an agricultural holiday (= chag ha-katzir), marking the conclusion of the wheat harvest. [See Shmot 23:16 & Vayikra 23:15-17.]

This phenomena - that each of the shalosh regalim contains both historical and agricultural significance - begs explanation, and suggests that we search for a thematic connection between each perspective - for each holiday.

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

Recall from our study of Sefer Shmot that God orchestrated the events of the Exodus in such a manner that we would celebrate this event specifically at the onset of the spring. [See Shmot 13:2-3, 23:14-15, & Devarim 16:1-2.]

Thematically, this may suggest that our freedom from bondage reflects only the **first** stage of the redemption process, just as the spring is only the first stage in the yearly cycle of the harvest season.

However, if this assumption is correct, then we should extend this reasoning to the other two holidays as well. One could suggest that Shavu'ot and Sukkot, respectively, each focuses on a certain aspect of the culmination of the redemption process that began with the Exodus. Let's explain how.

Recall how the Torah presented a double purpose for the Exodus from Egypt:

- 1) to receive the Torah at Har Sinai
- "... ta'avdun et Elokim ba-har ha-zeh" (see Shmot 3:12)
- 2) to inherit the Land of Israel
- "...a'aleh etchem...el eretz zavat chalav u-dvash"
- (see 3:17).

[See TSC shiur on Parshat Shmot.]

This double purpose may be reflected in the respective historical aspects of the two 'harvest' holidays that follow the 'spring' holiday. Clearly, **Shavu'ot** - the 'grain harvest' holiday - commemorates the events of **matan Torah**. Hence, we must conclude that **Sukkot** - the fruit harvest holiday - must commemorate in some manner our entry into the Land of Israel.

We discussed this aspect in detail in the above shiur.

PARSHAT TAZRIA - From 7 to 8 [& for Shmini Atzeret]

What is so special about the number 'eight' in Chumash? Is it only coincidental that:

- * In Sefer Breishit - specifically the 'eighth day' is chosen for

Brit Milah;

- * In Parshat Shmini - specifically the 'eighth day' is chosen for the dedication of the Mishkan;
- * In Parshat Metzora - the 'eighth day' is chosen for the day on which the cleansed Metzora, Zav, and Zavah bring their special korbanot;
- * In Parshat Emor - the final holiday is "SHMINI atzeret" - the 'eighth day' of Succot!

In the following shiur, we attempt to explain why the number eight is so special, based on the Biblical significance of the number seven.

INTRODUCTION

In previous shiurim we have discussed the special relationship between the Number SEVEN and 'nature', especially in regard to the "shalosh regalim" [the three pilgrimage holidays]. For example, in our shiur on Parshat Emor we noted that is not by chance that the Torah commands us to:

- * Celebrate specifically SEVEN days of Chag Ha'matzot in the **spring**; and then -
- * To count SEVEN weeks until the **grain harvest** holiday of Shavuot; and finally -
- * To celebrate our **fruit harvest** during the SEVEN days of Succot.

The fact that each of these holidays include either seven days or seven weeks suggests a connection between the number seven and agriculture. By emphasizing SEVEN in relation to these agricultural holidays, the Torah highlights our need to recognize that the powers of nature are indeed God's creation, and we must thank Him accordingly.

Similarly, our shiur on Parshat Breishit discussed how the Torah presents of the story of Creation as taking place in SEVEN days – to emphasize how the very creation of 'nature' itself was a willful act of the One God - and not the result of conflicts among a pantheon of many gods, each exerting its power over a certain part of nature.

In the following shiur, we return to Sefer Breishit in search of the biblical significance of the number 'eight', to show how and why it should relate to those 'seven' days of Creation.

EIGHT & BRIT MILAH

In some of the examples quoted above from Sefer Vayikra, 'eight' appears to be significant simply because it follows a sequence of 'seven' days. For example:

- * "Yom Ha'shmini" follows the SEVEN days of the "miluim";
- * The korbanot on the eighth day of the Metzora and Zav follow their minimum SEVEN day "tahara" period;
- * "Shmini Atzeret" follows the SEVEN days of Succot.

However, when God first commanded Avraham Avinu that "brit milah" must be performed on the 'eighth day' after a child's birth (see Breishit 17:12) - there is no apparent reason why God chose specifically the 'eighth day'. Certainly, it had nothing to do with a prior period of 'seven days' (as did the other examples of a special 'eighth day' mentioned above).

[Even though we are told in Parshat Tazria that the mother is "tamey" (spiritually unclean) for the first seven days after her son's birth (see Vayikra 12:2-5), there does not appear to be any logical connection between these seven days and the commandment to perform "milah" on the eighth day that was first given way back in Sefer Breishit. In fact, it seems quite the opposite - that because brit milah needs to be performed on the eighth day, her 'tumah' period is 'truncated' from 14 days to seven days.]

In the following shiur, we re-examine this covenant between God and Avraham Avinu [17:1-11/ better known as "brit milah"] in the 'wider' context of Sefer Breishit - to uncover a thematic connection between the 'eighth day' and the 'seven days' of Creation. [Hopefully, it will help us understand not only why "milah" is on the 'eighth day', but also why the holiday of "Shmini Atzeret" is so important.]

As you most probably recall, the Torah uses several names to describe God (e.g. Elokim, Havaya, kel-shaddai, etc.). However, when the narrative of "brit milah" begins in chapter 17, something very peculiar takes place, as God introduces Himself to Avraham Avinu for the first time as "kel-shaddai" - after which the Torah consistently refers to God as "Elokim" (until the end of that chapter).

To appreciate the thematic importance of this observation, we must first undertake a quick review of all the previous instances in Sefer Breishit when God spoke to man, paying special attention to when the Torah uses "shem Elokim".

IN WHAT 'NAME' DOES GOD SPEAK TO MAN?

In our shiur on Parshat Breishit, we explained how Chumash presents two parallel stories of God's creation of the universe:

- 1) "b'shem ELOKIM" (1:1 -2:4) - [or 'perek aleph'] which focused on God's creation of NATURE, i.e. a structured universe, in SEVEN days.
- 2) "b'shem HAVAYA" (2:5-4:26) - [or 'perek bet'] which focused on God's special relationship with Man, i.e. the creation of Gan Eden, and man's banishment from that environment after he sinned.

Without going into the complex details and deeper meaning of this 'double presentation', we will simply posit that God's relationship with man develops along the lines of each of these two perspectives, as each of these divine Name will reflect a different perspective of the developing relationship between man and God.

For example, in perek aleph, God - b'shem Elokim - blesses man that he be fruitful & multiply, master the earth and rule over all other living creatures (see 1:26-28). In contrast to this perspective of man as ruler over God's Creations, in perek bet - b'shem Havaya -man is created in order to become God's servant, whose job is to tend and watch over His Garden (see 2:15-17).

This 'double perspective' is found once again in the Torah's account of the Flood, as God's decision to destroy the generation of the Flood (due to their sinful behavior) is presented according to both of these perspectives:

- 1) b'shem Elokim - see 6:9-6:22.
- 2) b'shem Havaya - see 6:5-8 & 7:1-5.

Likewise, in the aftermath of the MABUL, God redefines His relationship with man, again from both perspectives:

- 1) b'shem Elokim - see 9:1-17
- 2) b'shem Havaya - see 8:18-21

After the flood, the Torah describes ["b'shem Elokim"] how the children of Noah multiply and disperse into seventy nations (10:1-32), but immediately afterwards details God's punishment of the builders of the Tower of Babel while referring to God using "shem Havaya" (see 11:1-10).

At this point in Chumash (i.e. at the beginning of Parshat Lech Lecha) this pattern (of 'double presentation') seems to end - for the Torah uses exclusively "shem Havaya" as it describes all the conversations between God and Avraham Avinu, from chapter 12 thru chapter 16. The Torah's exclusive use of "shem Havaya" to describe these encounters is thematically consistent with our assertion that God's Name of "Havaya" relates to the special relationship between man and God - where man is expected to act as a servant of God.

For example, God's choice of Avraham Avinu to become the forefather of His special nation is described b'shem Havaya (see 12:1-9); so too His re-iteration of that promise after Lot's departure (see 13:14-17).

Similarly, when God formalizes that promise into a covenant in "brit bein ha'tarim" (see 15:1-20) - again we find the Torah's employs "shem Havaya" in its description of God.

For some reason, this exclusive (and logical) use of "shem Havaya" in the Torah's description of God's relationship with Avraham Avinu changes in chapter seventeen - when the Torah first uses "shem Elokim" to describe how God speaks to Avraham Avinu at "brit milah"!

To understand the reason for this sudden change, let's take a closer look at how that chapter begins, noticing how God first introduces Himself as "kel sha-dai" before speaking to him b'shem ELOKIM:

"When Avram was ninety-nine years, God [HAVAYA] appeared to Avram and said to him: "ANI KEL SHA-DAI", walk before Me and be blameless. And I will establish My COVENANT between Me and you... Avram fell on his face, and God [ELOKIM] spoke to him saying... This is my COVENANT with you..." (17:1-4)

As you study these psukim, and the ones that follow, note how God (b'shem Elokim):

- a) changes Avram's name to Avraham;
- b) blesses him that he will multiply ("pru u'rvu");
- c) promises that he will become a great nation;
- d) promises him and his future generations Eretz Canaan;
- e) promises to be his God ("le'hiyot l'cha l'ELOKIM");
- f) commands him to circumcise his male children, etc.

In addition to these details in these psukim, pay attention as well to their style - as they share some very interesting similarities to the only two earlier instances where Chumash uses "shem Elokim" to describe God speaking to man:

- (I) After the creation of man on the sixth day (1:27-30);
- (II) After the Flood (see 9:1-17).

To verify this, review those two sets of psukim, noting the parallels to the narrative of "brit milah":

- I) On the sixth day, after man is created b'tzelem ELOKIM, God (b'shem ELOKIM) blesses him that he should:
 - a) be fruitful and multiply ("pru u'rvu");
 - b) be master and ruler of the living kingdom;
 - c) eat from the plants and fruit of the trees.
- II) Some ten generations later, after the Flood, God (b'shem ELOKIM) blesses Noah and his children in a very similar fashion (9:1-7), including:
 - a) to be fruitful and multiply ("pru u'rvu");
 - b) to be master of the living kingdom;
 - c) permission to eat living creatures (not only plants);

However, the most striking parallel to "brit milah" is found in the special covenant that God ["b'shem Elokim"] makes with Noah immediately after these blessings as described in 9:8-12:

"vhakimoti et briti itchem... [9:11/ compare 17:7-8]
 "va'yomer Elokim, zot ot ha'brit..." [19:12/ compare 17:9-10]

This covenant, better known as "brit ha'keshet" (the rainbow covenant), reflects the establishment of a special relationship between God and mankind, as God promises that He will never again bring about the total destruction of His Creation. [See 9:11-15 / see also Ramban on 6:18, especially his final explanation of the word "brit", based on the word "briya"!]

It is rather amazing that the next time that God speaks to man b'shem Elokim is only some ten generations later - at Brit Milah, when He challenges Avraham Avinu to accept yet another covenant. Note the striking textual similarities between these two covenants, i.e. "brit Milah" and "brit ha'keshet":

- a) to be fruitful and multiply 9:1 / 17:2,6;
 - c) "v'hakimoti et briti..." 9:11 / 17:7;
 - d) "ha'aterz" // "eretz canaan" 9:13,16,17 / 17:8
 - e) "ot brit": "ha'milah // ha'keshet" 9:13,17 / 17:12;
- [to verify this, open your Tanach & compare them yourself]

However, in addition to these similarities, in "brit Milah" we find an additional, yet very important promise - "li'hiyot lachem l'Elokim" [to be a God for you] - reflecting a much CLOSER

relationship with God. In fact, this key phrase is repeated twice, for it emphasizes and defines the purpose of Brit Milah (read 17:7-8 carefully!).

ONE STEP 'ABOVE' NATURE

With this background, we can suggest a reason for why God [b'shem Elokim] commands Avraham to perform "brit milah" specifically on the eighth day.

Note the progression that has emerged as we followed God's relationship with man, from the perspective of 'shem Elokim':
 STAGE 1) The Creation of NATURE in SEVEN days (1:1-2:4);
 STAGE 2) The covenant with Noach after the Flood (9:1-17);
 STAGE 3) The "Brit Milah" covenant with Avraham Avinu to be performed on the EIGHTH day (17:1-14).

One could suggest that circumcision on the EIGHTH day relates to this elevation of man's spiritual level, ONE step above the level of his original creation in SEVEN days.

Let's explain this statement, based on the three stages of this progression b'shem Elokim:

(1) During the first seven days, God brought the universe to a stage of development where it appears to 'take care of itself'. Be it vegetation, animal, or man, all species of life secure their existence by their ability to reproduce; they become fruitful and multiply (e.g. "zo'ray'ah zerah", "zachar u'nekeyvah", "pru u'rvu", etc.). Man's mastery of this creation, his desire to conquer and his ability to harness it, are all part of this phenomenon that we call NATURE. The first chapter of Breishit teaches us that [what we refer to as] nature, did not just happen by chance, rather it was a willful act of God. [By resting on Shabbat, once every seven days, we remind ourselves of this point.]

(2) After the "mabul", God (b'shem Elokim) 'starts over' by re-establishing His relationship with mankind in a covenant with Noach, known as "brit ha'keshet". This covenant reflects a relationship very similar to that in God's original creation in seven days, with some 'minor' changes: Man remains master of His universe (9:2), with a 'small change' in his diet (9:3-5), and a commandment that it is forbidden to murder a fellow human (9:6-7). However, the basic laws of nature remain the same (see 9:8).

(3) Up until Brit Milah, man's relationship with God b'shem Elokim remained distant. Although Man was the pinnacle of God's creation with certain minimal expectations of moral behavior, he was basically just part of nature. Man was given power; he acted like God (b'tzelem Elokim), but was not CLOSE to Him. At Brit Milah, Avraham is raised to a higher level. He and his offspring are chosen to represent God as His special nation, and towards that purpose, they are awarded a special relationship with God, as they are now destined to represent Him, i.e. -"li'hiyot lachem l'Elokim".

Then, as an "ot" [a sign] to symbolize this relationship, they are commanded to circumcise their children on the 'eighth day'. Hence, "milah" specifically on the EIGHTH day may reflect this additional level in the creation process, which first took place in SEVEN days. [What the Maharal refers to as "m'al ha'teva - above nature!]

In other words, the eighth day can be understood as representative of one final stage of the creation process. Just as the seven days of Creation - b'shem Elokim - included a progression from "domem" (the inanimate objects / i.e. "shmayim v'aretz"); to "tzomayach" (vegetation); to "chai" (the animal kingdom); to "adam" (man) - the 'eighth day' reflects how man has been elevated to a higher level in his relationship with God.

To elevate Creation to a higher awareness of God's existence, a special covenant is made with the offspring of Avraham, and we remind ourselves of this covenant specifically by performing "brit Milah" on the eighth day after a child's birth.

[This interpretation could reflect a statement made by Reish Lakish, explaining the meaning of God's name "kel sha-dai" which is first introduced at Brit Milah (see 17:1-2):

What's the meaning of "ani kel-sha'dai"? God said: I am the One who said to the world "dai" - enough, or stop]."
(see Yalkut Shimoni siman 81, Chagiga 12a)
[See also commentary of the "Torah Tmima" on this pasuk.]

shabbat shalom,
menachem

This explanation may help us understand the complexity in the opening lines of the Brit Milah narrative: God, b'shem Havaya - the Name of God which Avraham is familiar with up until this point - informs Avraham that He is "kel sha-dai", the God who had 'stopped' His process of creation after seven days (17:1-2). Now, b'shem Elokim, the Name of God that orchestrated the creation in seven days, intervenes yet one more time. He establishes a covenant with Avraham, to command him with the mitzvah of "brit milah", to raise him ONE level higher, i.e. closer to God.

Thus, God's commandment that we perform Brit Milah on the eighth day is not incidental. Rather, it reflects the very nature of our special relationship with God. In fact, one could suggest that God's relationship with His nation now becomes part of 'the nature of the universe'. Just as the sun will always rise and set, so too, Am Yisrael will always be His nation to represent him (see Yirmiyahu 33:19-26); as reflected by the Torah's use of "shem Elokim".

With this background, let's return to the various examples of this '7 - 8' relationship in Sefer Vayikra, as "brit milah" on the eighth day was only one example.

SEVEN DAYS "MILUIM" / "YOM HA'SHMINI":

As explained in our shiur on Parshat Shmini, the seven days necessary to dedicate the Mishkan reflect the parallel between Bnei Yisrael's construction of the Mishkan to serve God, to God's creation of nature in seven days, to serve Him. [See Tehillim 104 - "borchi nafshi..."]

Then, on the 'eighth day' ["yom ha'shmini"], God commands Bnei Yisrael to offer a special set of korbanot - in anticipation of His "shchinah" that will descend upon the Mishkan - reflecting the return of God's presence. In this manner, the Mishkan now becomes the focal point for the development of the special relationship between God and Bnei Yisrael, just as "brit milah" on the eighth day was a sign of that special covenant.

SEVEN DAYS "TAHARA" / EIGHTH DAY "KORBANOT"

(Metzora, Zav, Zava):

Different types of "tumah" are caused by some abnormal behavior of the body. Seven days of "tahara" are required to return the "tamei" person back to the 'camp' - to his normal existence, his natural habitat. Then on the eighth day, he must bring a special korban to allow his entry into the Mishkan.

[Note the parallel between this process, and its korbanot, to that of the kohanim during the seven-day miluim and Yom ha'Shmini.]

SEVEN DAYS OF SUCCOT / SHMINI ATZERET:

As agriculture and nature go hand in hand, all of the agricultural holidays follow cycles of seven (see Vayikra chapter 23). In the spring (chag ha'aviv), as the grain harvest begins, we bring "korban ha'omer" and celebrate chag ha'matzot for SEVEN days. Then we count SEVEN WEEKS until the completion of the wheat harvest, bring "korban shte'i ha'lechem", and celebrate chag ha'SHAVUOT. On succot, "chag ha'asif", at the end of the agricultural year ("b'tzeit ha'shana /see Shmot 23:16), we thank God for our fruit harvest by celebrating for seven days and bringing the "arba minim" to the Mikdash.

At the very end of this cycle of agricultural holidays, we add SHMINI ATZERET, a special gathering with no special agricultural mitzvah. It is simply a time to stop and reflect on the holiday season and year that has passed. On this 'eighth day', we focus on the special relationship between God and Bnei Yisrael.

This special relationship between God and Bnei Yisrael that began with Brit Milah, reaches its fullest expression with Matan Torah with Brit Sinai.

Based on this interpretation, it is understandable why Chazal chose this holiday to celebrate as SIMCHAT TORAH, and to conclude on this day the yearly 'cycle' of reading the Torah.

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. In what way could Shavuot be considered the "eighth", after seven cycles of seven. Compare this to the din of the Yovel year in parshat B'har. Why do you think that Chazal refer to Shavuot as "chag ha'atzeret". In what way is it similar to "Shmini Atzeret".

B. Based on the above shiur, why do you think that prior to Brit Milah, God changes both Avraham's and Sarah's names by adding a "hey"? Relate your answer to Hashem's name and His introduction in 17:1-4.

C. Based on the parallels between creation and brit milah, why do you think God chose to make the "ot" of this covenant on the part of the body which performs "pru u'rvu".

Explain why we thank God in birchat ha'mazon for the "aretz", then "britcha asher chatamta bi'bsareinu", and then toratcha sh'lomad'tanu"

D. Note in Sefer Yirmiyahu that even the Creation itself is considered a covenant: see 33:25-26, and relate these psukim to the above shiur.

E. Relate the above shiur to the minhag of "sheva brachot" at a wedding, and the seven days of mourning after death.

F. See Rambam Hilchot M'lachim chapter nine [the laws concerning the SEVEN mitzvot of Bnei Noach]. Relate this Rambam to the above shiur.

Parshas Emor: Commemorating the Desert Experience: An Analysis of Parshat Hamo'adot (Ch. 23)

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. PARASHAT HAMO'ADOT

The only complete treatment of the holiday calendar found in the Torah is the centerpiece of our Parashah. Although reading it in the original (to which we will refer throughout the shiur) is preferable, here is a translation which may be used for reference. Paragraph breaks represent separation of Parashiot and those few terms which are in bold-faced print will be explained in the shiur:

1 Hashem spoke to Mosheh, saying:

2 Speak to the people of Yisra'el and say to them: These are the appointed festivals of Hashem that you shall proclaim as Mikra'ei Kodesh, my appointed festivals.

3 Six days shall work be done; but the seventh day is a Shabbat Shabbaton, a Mikra Kodesh; you shall do no work: it is a Shabbat to Hashem throughout your settlements.

4 These are the appointed festivals of Hashem, the Mikra'ei Kodesh, which you shall celebrate at the time appointed for them.

5 In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, there shall be a passover offering to Hashem,

6 and on the fifteenth day of the same month is the festival of unleavened bread to Hashem; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.

7 On the first day you shall have a Mikra Kodesh; you shall not work at your occupations.

8 For seven days you shall present Hashem's offerings by fire; on the seventh day there shall be a Mikra Kodesh: you shall not work at your occupations.

9 Hashem spoke to Mosheh:

10 Speak to the people of Yisra'el and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the omer of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest.

11 He shall raise the omer before Hashem, that you may find acceptance; on the day after the Shabbat the priest shall raise it.

12 On the day when you raise the omer, you shall offer a lamb a year old, without blemish, as a burnt offering to Hashem.

13 And the grain offering with it shall be two-tenths of an ephah of choice flour mixed with oil, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to Hashem; and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, one-fourth of a hin.

14 You shall eat no bread or parched grain or fresh ears until that very day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your settlements.

15 And from the day after the Shabbat, from the day on which you bring the omer of the elevation offering, you shall count off seven weeks; they shall be complete. 16 You shall count until the day after the seventh Shabbat, fifty days; then you shall present an offering of new grain to Hashem.

17 You shall bring from your settlements two loaves of bread as an elevation offering, each made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of choice flour, baked with leaven, as first fruits to Hashem.

18 You shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish, one young bull, and two rams; they shall be a burnt offering to Hashem, along with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to Hashem.

19 You shall also offer one male goat for a sin offering, and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of well-being.

20 The priest shall raise them with the bread of the first fruits as an elevation offering before Hashem, together with the two lambs; they shall be holy to Hashem for the priest.

21 On that same day you shall make proclamation; you shall hold a Mikra Kodesh; you shall not work at your occupations. This is a statute forever in all your settlements throughout your generations.

22 When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the alien: I am Hashem your God.

23 Hashem spoke to Mosheh, saying:

24 Speak to the people of Yisra'el, saying: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a Shabbaton, a commemoration of T'ruah, a Mikra Kodesh.

25 You shall not work at your occupations; and you shall present Hashem's offering by fire.

26 Hashem spoke to Mosheh, saying:

27 Now, the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a Mikra Kodesh for you: you shall deny

yourselves and present Hashem's offering by fire;
 28 and you shall do no work during that entire day; for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before Hashem your God.
 29 For anyone who does not practice self-denial during that entire day shall be cut off from the people.
 30 And anyone who does any work during that entire day, such a one I will destroy from the midst of the people.
 31 You shall do no work: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your settlements.
 32 It shall be to you a Shabbat Shabbaton , and you shall deny yourselves; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening you shall keep your Shabbat.
 33 Hashem spoke to Mosheh, saying:
 34 Speak to the people of Yisra'el, saying: On the fifteenth day of this seventh month, and lasting seven days, there shall be the festival of booths to Hashem.
 35 The first day shall be a Mikra Kodesh ; you shall not work at your occupations.
 36 Seven days you shall present Hashem's offerings by fire; on the eighth day you shall observe a Mikra Kodesh and present Hashem's offerings by fire; it is a solemn assembly; you shall not work at your occupations.
 37 These are the appointed festivals of Hashem, which you shall celebrate as times of Mikra Kodesh , for presenting to Hashem offerings by fire - burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its proper day -
 38 apart from the Shabbats of Hashem, and apart from your gifts, and apart from all your votive offerings, and apart from all your freewill offerings, which you give to Hashem.
 39 Now, the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall keep the festival of Hashem, lasting seven days; a Shabbaton on the first day, and a Shabbaton on the eighth day.
 40 On the first day you shall take the fruit of majestic trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before Hashem your God for seven days.
 41 You shall keep it as a festival to Hashem seven days in the year; you shall keep it in the seventh month as a statute forever throughout your generations.
 42 You shall live in booths for seven days; all that are citizens in Yisra'el shall live in booths,
 43 so that your generations may know that I made the people of Yisra'el live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am Hashem your God.
 44 Thus Mosheh declared to the people of Yisra'el the appointed festivals of Hashem.

II. SEVEN QUESTIONS ON THE PARASHAH

Since every subsection within our selection utilizes and highlights the number seven (which is a topic for a separate shiur), I would like to pose seven questions on the text:

- 1) Five of the holidays mentioned are also described as a Shabbaton - and two of them, [the weekly] Shabbat and Yom haKippurim are called Shabbat Shabbaton. What is the meaning of this word (which is clearly related to Shabbat)?
- 2) The listing presented is "the appointed times of Hashem which you (the B'nei Yisra'el) shall declare". Those holidays which fall on a given day of the month (e.g. Pesach on Nisan 15) are clearly declared by the B'nei Yisra'el, when the court announces the new month (under those circumstances when the calendar was fixed on a monthly basis by the testimony of witnesses who had seen the new moon); this is the Gemara's explanation for the liturgical phrase M'kadesh Yisra'el v'haZ'manim (He who sanctifies Yisra'el and the seasons) - it is Yisra'el who sanctify the seasons (BT Berakhot 49a). It is, therefore, understandable why Pesach, Shavu'ot etc. are listed in a group headed by "which you shall declare in their time". Shabbat, on the other hand, exists independently of our declaration or observance of that holy day (which is why the signature form in the Shabbat liturgy is M'kadesh haShabbat, with no mention of Yisra'el (see, however, JT Berakhot 8:1 for a variant version). Why then is Shabbat included in our list? This question is a bit stronger when viewed against the backdrop of the Gemara in Arakhin (11b), which notes that the reason we don't say Hallel on Shabbat is because Shabbat is not considered a Mo'ed (appointed time).
- 3) In the section (vv. 9-14) relating to the beginning-of-the-harvest offering (brought on the second day of Hag haMatzot), the Torah describes this offering as an omer - which is the amount of the offering. Not only is it odd to refer to an offering by its volume, this term is repeated four times within a space of 6 verses. What is the significance of the omer as an appellation for this offering?
- 4) At the end of the section detailing the festival of Shavu'ot (vv. 15-22), the Torah interjects the laws of Pe'ah (leaving the corner of the field unharvested for the poor) and Leket (leaving the gleaning of the harvest - again for the poor). What is the

rationale behind the inclusion of these "non-holiday" laws in our list?

5) In v. 24, the holiday of the first day of the seventh month (which we commonly call "Rosh haShanah") is denoted not only as a Shabbaton , but also as a Zikhron T'ruah - meaning "commemoration of a [Shofar's] blast". Although Rashi explains that this refers to the obligation to recite the various theme-driven verses during Musaf of Rosh haShanah, this only works if we read Zikhron T'ruah as "a mention of a Shofar blast "; however, a simpler read is "a commemoration of a Shofar blast ". What is being commemorated by the blasting of the Shofar?

6) In v. 32, Yom haKippurim is called a Shabbat Shabbaton (just as it is earlier in Vayyikra - 16:31). Why is Yom haKippurim given this title - which is otherwise only accorded to Shabbat?

7) A careful look at the "parashah" of Sukkot / Sh'mini Atzeret (vv. 33-44) reveals that there are really two distinct sections within this one parashah. Note that v. 37 begins with Ele Mo'adei Hashem , a perfect conclusion to the opening Ele Mo'adei Hashem (v. 4). Once that "conclusion" is finished (v. 38), the Torah adds another perspective of Sukkot / Sh'mini Atzeret. Note the differences between the two sections:

a) In the first section, the holiday is called Hag haSukkot , but does not explain the meaning for this title; the second refers to it as Hag l'Hashem - but associates the timing with the end of the harvest season.

b) In the first section, both the first and eighth days are called Mikra'ei Kodesh ; in the second section both are called Shabbaton.

c) The first section only includes the commands regarding not working and bringing the proper offerings; the second includes the two Mitzvot unique to the holiday - the four species (Lulav, Etrog, Hadas, Aravah) and residing in the Sukkah. Our final question: Why are there two independent texts of Sukkot / Sh'mini Atzeret?

III THE VILNA GA'ON'S EXPLANATION

R. Eliyahu Kramer zt"l, known as the Ga'on miVilna (d. 1799), suggests a brilliant and innovative approach to understanding the first section which answers our second question - and a bit of the first.

[Introductory note: as the Torah instructs us in Sh'mot 12:16, we are not allowed to do M'lakhah on a Yom Tov, with the exception of Okhel Nephesh (M'lakhah needed for eating purposes for that day; this is permitted only when Yom Tov falls on a weekday). This is not true regarding Shabbat, on which all M'lakhah is forbidden - nor is it true for Yom haKippurim, where there is no permit for any food-related M'lakhah].

The Ga'on maintains that the first section (vv. 1-3) is not addressing [the weekly] Shabbat; rather, it operates as a header for the rest of the Parashah:

Six days shall work be done - this refers to the six holidays (first day of Pesach, last day of Pesach, Shavu'ot, Rosh haShanah [remember that from the Torah's perspective, even Rosh haShanah is only one day], first day of Sukkot and Sh'mini 'Atzeret) when some type of M'lakhah (Okhel Nephesh) may be done;

But the seventh day is a Shabbat Shabbaton- this refers to the seventh of these days, Yom haKippurim;

You shall do no work- on Yom haKippurim, all types of M'lakhah are forbidden.

In this fashion, the Ga'on explains the inclusion of Shabbat on our list - it isn't there at all! It also explains the use of the phrase Shabbat Shabbaton in v. 3 - it is referring to Yom haKippurim, which has already been titled Shabbat Shabbaton in Ch. 16.

Although there is much to recommend this approach, I would like to suggest one that not only responds to all of our questions, but also addresses this "Shabbat" section from a "p'shat" perspective.

IV. WHAT IS A "MIKRA KODESH"?

Before addressing the overall theme of this parashah, I would like to pose two questions of a general nature:

a) What is the meaning of the phrase Mikra Kodesh , which is the description of each one of these special days (along with a general name for all of them: v. 2,4,37)?

b) What is the rationale behind the placement of this list? Why is it set towards the end of Sefer Vayyikra? (Of course, this question could be posed no matter where it is placed; nevertheless, if we can find a solid reason why this parashah "belongs" here, that is a path we should pursue.)

REEXPERIENCING THE EVOLUTION OF THE GOY KADOSH

Every one of the days under discussion is liturgically referred to as a Zekher liY'tziat Mitzrayim - a "commemoration of the Exodus". Although it is abundantly clear why Pesach serves this purpose - and both Shabbat (D'varim 5:15) and Sukkot (Vayyikra 23:43) are connected with the Exodus in the Torah - the rest of the holidays don't have an apparent connection with the Exodus. Even the Sukkot association is weak if we understand Y'tzi'at Mitzrayim as the plagues and the crossing of the Reed Sea. Why is each of these holy days considered a Zekher liY'tziat Mitzrayim?

I would like to suggest that the entire system of the Jewish calendar - including both Shabbat and all of the Yamim Tovim - is designed to help us reexperience and internalize the "highlights" of our travels through the desert. In other words, we must adopt a more complete and inclusive understanding of Y'tzi'at Mitzrayim . As we examine the salient features of each of these holy days, specifically as they are outlined - and alluded to - in our text, we will find that each of them reinforces a component of that experience which the Torah desires us to maintain. We will also find that the order of the holy days can be viewed as deliberate and sequentially significant.

When we stood at the foot of Har Sinai - which was the intermediary goal of the Exodus (Sh'mot 3:12) - God assured us that if we keep His covenant, we will become a Goy Kadosh (a holy nation). There are two distinct elements in this formula: A nation, implying a unified purpose, common concern and pervasive sense of mutual responsibility. The second element is holiness, wherein that unified group is directed towards a sanctified purpose. This order is significant and indispensable; we must first achieve a sense of unity and fellowship before moving that group into the realm of the holy. It is only after this dual goal has been achieved that we can construct the Mishkan and allow God's Presence to rest among us - which is the pinnacle of the Goy Kadosh. The system of the Jewish calendar can best be understood through the prism of the evolution of the B'nei Yisra'el towards their destiny as a Goy Kadosh.

This explains why each of these holy days is considered a Mikra Kodesh . The word Mikra is used in only one other context (besides Sh'mot 12 - Pesach; our parashah and the other "listing" at Bamidbar 28) - in Bamidbar 10:2. God commanded Mosheh to fashion two trumpets of silver, which were to be used l'Mikra ha'Edah - to assemble the people. A Mikra is, therefore, a call of assembly. What then is a Mikra Kodesh? Simply an assembly for a holy purpose. In other words, a Mikra Kodesh is an actualization of the ideal of the Goy Kadosh - the group coming together for a holy purpose.

This also explains the placement of this parashah at this juncture in Vayyikra. After detailing the parameters of "public" Kedushah (the Mishkan and those impurities which cause defilement) and "private" Kedushah (see last week's shiur), along with the special Kedushah of the Kohanim (Chapters 21-22), the Torah brings these together as the private/individual Kedushah is manifested in the public domain, chiefly through the offices of the Kohanim.

After this introduction, we can re-examine the parashah, note the underlying theme and answer our questions.

V. ANALYZING THE PARASHAH

SHABBAT

Even though we are accustomed to thinking of Shabbat as a commemoration of - and testimony to - God's creation (see Sh'mot 20:12), Shabbat also has an explicit Zekher liY'tziat Mitzrayim dimension, as mentioned above. Besides the explicit verse (D'varim 5:15) cited previously, there is a direct Shabbat association with the desert experience which is uniquely tied up with the notion of national unity.

One introductory note: As we have mentioned in earlier shiurim, when studying Tanakh, we must simultaneously view the text as outsiders while experiencing it as participants. As outsiders, we are enriched with the global view of the entire

canonized text and the interpretations and comments of our sages. As participants, we only know what the original target audience (be it Mosheh, Aharon or the B'nei Yisra'el) knew; we must try to understand (to whatever extent possible) the impact of these particular words and phrases on the ears of this original audience.

When Shabbaton - a relatively rare word - is used, it certainly must evoke in the listener the original context in which it was used. A quick search of the Tanakh reveals that the earliest appearance of this word is in the Chapter 16 of Sh'mot - in the story of the Mahn (Manna).

The story of the Mahn is, (as we indicated in this year's shiur on Parashat Beshalach), the central turning point in the preparation of the B'nei Yisra'el for their arrival at Sinai.

A quick review of the story will help us understand the relevance of the story of the Mahn to our goal of building a holy nation.

There are two central features of how the B'nei Yisra'el were to respond to the Mahn.

- * They were to only take the proper amount per person in the household.

- * They were to take double on Friday and take none on Shabbat.

Each of these commands (which, for the most part, the whole nation followed) carries a critical step in the development of the holy nation.

R. Yaakov Medan, in a wonderful article (Megadim 17:61-90), points out that the command for each person to restrict himself to a daily portion for each member of the household represented not only a good deal of faith in God - but also tremendous self-restraint and concern for one's fellow. This is how he explains the "test" of the Mahn (16:4) - that we were tested to see how much concern each of us could demonstrate for our fellow, knowing that if we took more than our portion, someone else would go hungry. Indeed, the B'nei Yisra'el passed this test with flying colors! (v. 18) For a slave people, wandering in a desert to exercise this much self-restraint was a demonstration of their readiness to stand as a unified nation and to enter into a covenant which includes mutual responsibility.

This self-restraint was the first building block in the process of turning a multitude of slaves into a unified nation. The ability to maintain concern for one's fellow in the face of such temptation was the first indication that we would indeed be able to become a Goy Kadosh.

By beginning the parashah of Mikra'ei Kodesh with Shabbat - and by specifically referring to that day as a Shabbat Shabbaton , we are immediately reminded of - and brought back to - that wonderful demonstration of mutual concern with the Mahn. Indeed, Shabbat carries a powerful "social-justice" component (see Ramban at D'varim 5:15); by stepping back from our daily attempt to conquer the world and amass more for ourselves, we are given the golden opportunity to allow others in to our lives and to develop our own empathy for those less fortunate. In addition, the cessation from M'lakhah heightens our awareness of Who is really in charge and of our obligation to look out for all of His creatures.

HAG HAMATZOT

This one is pretty straightforward. In order to keep the experience of the Exodus at the forefront of our consciousness, the Torah commanded us to relive it (therefore calling it Hag haMatzot, underscoring the method by which we reexperience it) every year. Note that these holy days are also called Mikra'ei Kodesh , in that they remind us of our holy ingathering. Besides the overarching thematic Mikra Kodesh, this one is a bit special - if we think back to the various guidelines and restrictions given us in the context of the Korban Pesach (e.g. to be eaten as a household - see our shiur on Parashat Bo).

One question about this section which we must address is the repeated introduction in v. 4. Once the Torah already captioned this chapter (in v. 2) with the phrase "These are the appointed times..." why repeat it two verses later?

We will only get to this question near the end of the shiur in our discussion about the two sections of Sukkot / Sh'mini Atzeret.

OMER HAT'NUFAH

On the day after Hag haPesach (the second day of Hag haMatzot), we are commanded to offer up an Omer's worth of grain (barley). Why this amount - and why mention it so often?

When we look back at the Mahn story, we note that each portion of Mahn that fell was 1/10th of an Ephah - or 1 Omer's worth! It is not surprising that the Torah commands us to "lift up" (symbolically returning the Mahn to its rightful Owner) exactly that amount of grain the day after Pesach. The lesson is clear: Liberation must carry with it a renewed sense of concern for social welfare and a mutual responsibility. As soon as we have celebrated our freedom, the Torah commands us to remember the miracle of the Mahn - and our miraculous response to the test.

PE'AH AND LEKET

The exact middle verse of our parashah is the "interjected" command to leave Pe'ah (the corner of the field) and Leket (gleanings) for the poor. Now we can understand the significance of this addition - while harvesting, celebrating with a new grain offering (v. 16) etc., we must not forget our brothers and sisters who have fallen on hard times. The Torah interrupts the flow of the calendar to remind us that we can not be Holy without ensuring that we are doing so as a Nation.

ZIKHRON T'RUAH

When we come to evaluate the meaning of this phrase within the context of our parashah, we have to again return to the mode of "participant" as opposed to "observer". If the B'nei Yisra'el are commanded to perform an act of commemoration of a Shofar-blast, it must refer to a particular blast which they had already experienced - and are now being commanded to commemorate.

The only Shofar blast which we know of in their past was the blast (or series of blasts) at Har Sinai which prefaced and followed the Revelation. The festival of the first day of the seventh month ("Rosh haShanah") is, therefore, a commemoration of the stand at Sinai. The Shofar which we blow is intended to remind us of that great event.

When we first arrived at Sinai, the Torah describes us as "encamping opposite the mountain" (Sh'mot 19:2). The Hebrew verb for this encampment is not the expected vaYahanu ("and they encamped"), rather it is the singular vaYihan (lit. "and he encamped"). Rashi (ibid) is sensitive to this anomaly and explains that we encamped there "as one person, with one heart".

The stand at Sinai was the next step of the process begun with the Mahn (hence, Rosh haShanah is also called a Shabbaton) - moving from a Goy to a Goy Kadosh.

YOM HAKIPPURIM

We then move to a new level of Goy Kadosh . Previously, the unity we experienced was the product of the spirit of sharing and self-restraint. We now come to the day on which we allow ourselves to be stripped of all that divides us. We have no food, drink, fancy clothes (we dress in white because we are either angels or dead) or family life - we have all been "equalized". Yom haKippurim gives us the opportunity to move to a new level of mutual concern - and to focus that concern on a holy enterprise. The sole focus of Yom haKippurim in its first presentation in the Torah (Vayyikra 16) is the purification of the Mishkan. We have now moved from a Goy Kadosh in the abstract (the stand at Sinai) to a Goy Kadosh with a purpose and a focus of activity - sanctity of the camp and a reenshrinement of God's Presence. Yom haKippurim is called Shabbat Shabbaton because it is a "super-Mahn" experience; mutual concern focused on a holy goal.

SUKKOT AND SH'MINI ATZERET

At this point, it pays to review the three points of contrast between the two treatments of this holiday:

a) In the first section, the holiday is called Hag haSukkot , but does not explain the meaning for this title; the second refers to it as Hag l'Hashem - but associates the timing with the end of the harvest season.

b) In the first section, both the first and eighth days are called Mikra'ei Kodesh ; in the second section both are called

Shabbaton.

c) The first section only includes the commands regarding not working and bringing the proper offerings; the second includes the two Mitzvot unique to the holiday - the four species (Lulav, Etrog, Hadas, Aravah) and residing in the Sukkah. And now to the answers:

The first section of Sukkot / Sh'mini Atzeret deals with the holiday as a part of the agricultural cycle of celebration - a cycle which began with Hag haMatzot.

[This also explains why the first section here ends with the concluding Ele Mo'adei Hashem - closing off the "middle" section of the list which began at v. 4. This answers the question asked above (in the section on Hag haMatzot) as to why there is a second caption of our list in v. 4.] As such, it is simply called Hag haSukkot - a purely agricultural connotation. Keep in mind that a Sukkah is a booth used by the workers during harvest season when they could not return home every night - and to rest during the heat of the summer noontime. These days are denoted as Mikra'ei Kodesh - a teleology which is only realized in the second section. They are also replete with offerings and two days of non-work - dedicated to God - but there is no "unity" factor here.

The second treatment, beginning (v. 39) with Akh (which evokes the beginning of the Yom haKippurim section), is a dramatic turn. Instead of being a harvest festival, it is to take place "when you have gathered in the produce of the land" (i.e. that is when you are to celebrate, not the focus of the celebration). This festival includes a Shabbaton at the beginning and the end - bringing us back to the unity theme.

We are then given the two Mitzvot unique to Sukkot: Arba Minim (the Four Species) and Sukkah.

There are many Midrashim explaining the symbolism of the Arba Minim (e.g. they represent the four types of Jews, the four climes of Eretz Yisra'el, four part of the body) - but all of them rest on two basic Halakhic premises: All four species are indispensable for the Mitzvah (inclusion) and all four must be taken as one (community). The introduction of this Mitzvah here underscores the Shabbaton aspect of Sukkot.

Regarding the Mitzvah of Sukkah, the Rabbis said (BT Sukkah 27b): " 'all that are citizens in Yisra'el shall live in Sukkot' - this teaches that all of Yisra'el are worthy to reside in one Sukkah" (this is playing off the way that Sukkot is written in the verse - it could be read Sukkat which is singular, indicating all citizens residing in one Sukkah). This is, again, a Mitzvah which is indicative and symbolic of inclusion of all Jews. The Goy Kadosh is reinforced as we celebrate the end of the harvest.

What can we make of the culmination of our parashah? In what way is Sukkot an appropriate "pinnacle experience" in this sequence? Note that unlike the first treatment, in this second section the festival is called a Hag l'Hashem - a festival of God; that surely indicates something significant...what is it?

Looking back over the sequence of Hag haMatzot (freedom), Omer (the Mahn), Pe'ah (more social concern), Zikhron T'ruah (Har Sinai) and Yom haKippurim (Goy Kadosh) - we note that there is one critical, final step in the desert experience which has not yet been internalized.

As Ramban points out in his introduction to Sefer Sh'mot, the goal of the entire Exodus enterprise was to restore us to the glorious stature of our ancestors, with the Shekhinah residing in our midst. This was accomplished only when we constructed and successfully dedicated the Mishkan (which is, according to Ramban, why Sefer Sh'mot concludes at that point).

The Mishkan, although in the public domain, held a personal connection with each Jew. Not only were all prayers directed there (see MT Hilkhos T'fillah 1:3), but Aharon constantly wore the Hoshen, which included the names of all 12 tribes (on 12 stones) and the Ephod, whose shoulder-straps included all 12 tribes (on two stones). Every Jew had a place in the Mishkan - but could not practically come in.

The Sukkah, coming at the culmination of the season of holy days which walk us through the evolution of the B'nei Yisra'el into a Goy Kadosh, is evocative of the Mishkan. It is indeed fitting that this holiday, from its Shabbaton perspective, with its inclusive and communal approach to Kedushah, be called Hag l'Hashem .

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