

Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future  
Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

# To-Go™

## Sukkot 5773

*Dedicated in memory of Irby Cooper by his Loving Family*



### **Featuring Divrei Torah from**

Rabbi Zevulun Charlop • Rabbi Joshua Flug  
Rabbi Meir Goldwicht • Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky  
Mrs. Deena Rabinovich • Rabbi Kenny Schiowitz  
Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner Dr. Ilana Turetsky





Dear Friends,

It is my sincere hope that the Torah found in this virtual *sefer* may serve to enhance your Sukkot experience. We have designed this edition not only for the individual studying alone, but even more so for conversations around the Sukkot holiday table.

It is fitting and fortunate that the edition of the To Go series for Sukkot, when commandments and customs implore us to embrace all Jews and recognize that each Jew is a contributing member of Knesset Yisroel, is dedicated in memory of Mr. Irby Cooper by his loving family. Mr. Cooper's work on behalf of the Baron Hirsch Synagogue in Memphis and the Margolin Hebrew Academy with its Cooper Yeshiva High School for Boys was both his love and labor. His pioneering spirit built Memphis into a *makom torah*, a place where Torah is still accessible to all. As students of the Memphis community, products of his vision, build homes in communities around North America and Israel, we recognize that we are all beneficiaries of the seeds he sowed. May his memory continue to be a blessing.

*Chag Sameiach,*

**Rabbi Kenneth Brander**

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# Zeh Hakadosh Baruch Hu<sup>1</sup>

Rabbi Zevulun Charlop

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Probably the most popular and well known midrash relating to the *daled minim*, the four species that we take on Sukkos is the one that defines and distinguishes the wholeness of the Jewish people in its distinct and possibly at times disparate parts: even as the esrog has taste and fragrance, *taam vareyach*, so too are there Jews who combine Torah, identified with taste and *maasim tovim*, good works, identified with fragrance. The lulav refers to those Jews who have taste, Torah, but want for *maasim tovim*, fragrance. Others are likened to hadasim, to myrtles. They have *maasim tovim* but are not necessarily learned in Torah. Finally, we have the willows, the aravos, which have neither taste nor fragrance.

And the midrash wonders, how does *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* relate to these human willows, without taste or fragrance?

*What does the Holy One Blessed Be He do with or to them? He can't destroy them! Instead, He 'ties them all together into one congregation and they atone for each other.' And if you do this, at that very moment, I am uplifted!*

**Vayikra Rabbah 30:9**

ומה הקב"ה עושה להם לאבדן אי אפשר אלא  
אמר הקב"ה יוקשרו כולם אגודה אחת והן  
מכפרין אלו על אלו ואם עשיתם כך אותה  
שעה אני מתעלה.  
ויקרא רבה ל:ט

But the question remains, how and why do we need the aravos altogether? They have no Torah, they have no *maasim tovim*. What do they add or contribute? On the contrary, they may diminish from the wholesomeness and sanctity of the others, separate or united.

The answer, it seems to me, is provided two midrashim earlier, in anticipation almost, which astonishingly denominates each of the four species and each on its own as the Holy One Blessed Be He, even the lowly and undistinguished aravos.

What in the world does the midrash mean when it proclaims of each of the *minim*, including the aravos, individually, *Zeh Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, this is the Holy One Blessed Be He.

For me, this midrash is a startling articulation of one of the loftiest and essential teachings of Torah, of Yiddishkeit, that all Jews - and in a real sense all humanity - in different ways, whatever their station and whoever they be, share at bottom the breath of Hashem, the *tzelem Elokim*, the

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<sup>1</sup> Reprinted with permission from RIETS Rabbinic Alumni's CHAVRUSA Magazine, Tishrei 5771, September 2010

image of God, that He infused into *Adam Harishon* at the very inception of Creation. And, it is this truth which was self evident to the Founding Founders of these United States and speaks to the overriding splendor of the American democracy and sets it altogether apart from the French Revolution that followed.

The American Revolution was defined and took its strength from the Declaration of Independence which proclaims in that elegant and vaulting cadence that “We are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights.” With their invoking of the *Borei Olam Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, the Creator, these giants who “brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal,” projected the ultimate truth about all of us, that the *tzelem Elokim* — the irrepressible and undying spirit of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* — reposes securely, inextricably and eternally in us and our descendants.

## Murbiyos

Near the end of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, when literally and miraculously, victory was snatched from the jaws of defeat but which unfortunately brought in its wake massive casualties, my father, Rabbi Yechiel Michel Charlop *zt'l* shared with me on the Hoshanah Rabbah of that year, as the war was winding down and our enemies were on the run, that he now understood more fully the mishnah in *Sukkah* (*Sukkah* 45a).

*How was the mitzvah of aravah accomplished? There was a place below Yerushalayim called motza. The agents of the beis din would descend there and collect murbiyos of aravah and would erect them at the sides of the altar, with their tops bent over the altar...*

מצות ערבה כיצד מקום היה למטה מירושלים  
ונקרא מוצא יורדין לשם ומלקטין משם  
מורביות של ערבה ובאין וזוקפין אותן בצדי  
המזבח וראשיהן כפופין על גבי המזבח.

The Gemara (*Sukkah* 45a) describes these *murbiyos*, as very tall willows, which surrounded the *mizbeyach* on Hoshanah Rabbah and around which seven *hakafos* were made.

My father asked, why did they particularly choose aravos? They should have surrounded the *mizbeyach* with the beautiful esrogim or the imposing lulavim, or the sweet smelling and comely hadasim instead.

It was in the context of the heavy and heartbreaking casualty reports that he sensed a new understanding of *murbiyos* — the aravos of Hoshanah Rabbah. While it is true that the talmidim of the Yeshivot Hesder who served in *Tzahal* sustained, early on, possibly the greatest losses certainly in relative proportion to their numbers. This was owing to the fact that they chose to stay at their posts, to man the border on Yom Kippur, so that their less observant comrades could go home for the Holy Day.

Nonetheless, it was clear that the vast majority of those who died *al Kiddush Hashem*, protecting and defending Eretz Yisrael against the sneak, brutal and sweeping onslaught of the enemy, were the less lettered and less devout Israeli soldiers. My father noted that they may have been perceived in some quarters as the aravos of our people — no taste and no fragrance. However, the truth of the matter was that in all likelihood without their sacrifices, we could not have emerged victorious in those dark days. Without them, heaven forefend, there may not have been a State of Israel today.

On Hoshanah Rabbah, a day likened to Yom Kippur, it was the aravos which adorned the *mizbeyach*, because their human representations were closest to the *mizbeyach*. They proved to be the *korbanos*, the sacrifices, which saved the day. In the conglomerate of the Jewish people they were surely not an unimportant component. Therefore, no less of them do we declare *zeh HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

Having said all this, however, as *bnei Torah* and *maaminim b'nei maaminim*, we must know that no less than the heroic soldier on the battlefield, in different and possibly in profounder ways, *Talmud Torah* and *yiras Shamayim* cannot be trumped. This truth should never be lost on us.

One of the premier commentaries, the *Atzei Yosef* found in editions of the midrash, understood the inclusion of the aravos among the *daled minim* from a different vantage point. With their failings and all — without *taam* and *reyach* — it was the aravos who surprisingly wanted to be at one with the esrogim, the lulavim and the hadassim. That in itself is a mighty saving grace.

## Avaryanim

The authors of the Yom Kippur machzor deemed it appropriate to open the Kol Nidrei service with a special plea to the *beis din shel maalah*, the tribunal above and the *beis din shel matah*, the tribunal here on earth, to allow the *avaryanim*, loosely translated as sinners, to pray with the congregation. Indeed it can and should be construed as a call of welcome to them.

I often wondered why the word *avaryan* for sinner was chosen and not the more common *posh'im* and *chof'im*, words or forms of these words which abound in the machzor? It seemed to me that *avaryan* was deliberately selected over its more familiar synonyms because it also resonates the word *ivri*, which is a highlight of *Maftir Yonah*, which we read as prelude to *Neilah*. Most of us are familiar with the story of Jonah the prophet who was fleeing from the Almighty who put upon him an urgent, awesome, charge to preach teshuvah to the forsaken metropolis of Nineveh, which otherwise stood imminently to be destroyed. Jonah apparently for some reason not altogether clear to us, took flight on a ship which in time was met by a furious storm which threatened to break his ship apart, burying crew and passengers in the deep oblivion of the sea.

When his fellow voyagers asked Jonah, the stranger among them, who they properly suspected is the cause of their impending misfortune, “who are you and where do you come from?” Unafraid he says *Ivri Anochi*, I am a Hebrew, even as he is running away from G-d.

*Avaryanim* was the word chosen for sinners because of its cognitive similarity to *ivri*. We don't force the aravah to be bound up with the other more committed kinds. In fact, the aravah, as distanced as he is from the many hallowed perspectives of our faith, nonetheless wants to be part and parcel of the Jewish people and to show himself before the Almighty at least once a year. His Jewish *tzelem Elokim* is still alive and pulsating and is witnessed to the fact that he is not, heaven forefend, sundered from his roots, from klal Yisrael. And in this sense, it can be said of this aravah *zeh Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. He is a *posheya* or a *choteih* perhaps, but he proclaims *ivri anochi*, and therefore he is called an *avaryan*.

# Vat'chasreihu me'at m'Elokim, v'chavod v'hadar te'atreihu

But there is another concept, certainly no less majestic than *tzelem Elokim*, and probably another understanding of *tzelem Elokim*, that *tzelem Elokim* not only applies to the moral and ethical imperatives which ought to distinguish him from other inhabitants of the universe, but gives nearly literal meaning to David's soaring conception of who man is when he proclaims,

*When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars which You established. What is man that You are mindful of him and the son of man that You think of him? You have made him slightly lower than Elokim and have crowned him with glory and honor.*

**Tehillim 8:4-6**

כִּי אֶרְאֶה שָׁמַיִךְ מַעֲשֵׂי אֲצַבְעֹתֶיךָ יָרַח וְכּוֹכָבִים  
אֲשֶׁר כּוֹנְנִתָּהּ. מָה אֲנוֹשׁ כִּי תִזְכְּרֶנּוּ וּבֶן אָדָם כִּי  
תִּפְקְדֶנּוּ. וַתַּחֲסִיחֵהוּ מֵעֵט מַאֲלֵהִים וְכָבוֹד וְהָדָר  
תַּעֲטִרְהוּ.

תהלים ח:ד-ו

I don't believe that ever before in human history has this psalm been more understood and felt as in the last 25 years, and increasingly in the last five to ten years. The psalm introduces the notion of *va'tchasreihu me'at me'Elokim*, of man being slightly less than Elokim, with *ki er'eh shamecha, ma'aseh etzb'osecha, yareyach v'chochavim asher konantah, When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars which You established ...*

Buckminster Fuller, the noted architect and iconoclast who died several years ago observed, "Until I was 28, we knew only about our own galaxy. In 1923, Hubble discovered another galaxy. Since then we have discovered 2 billion beyond that." And I might add that in the years since, even millions and possibly billions more. Amazing! But that is exactly what Chazal told us nearly two millennia ago in *Brachos* (32b) and specifically in the explanatory note that appears in the Artscroll edition of the Talmud (note 23), which invokes Chazal's understanding centuries ago of the vastness of the universe.

The Gemara, undoubtedly taken from some ancient *Mesorah* that was handed down from generation to generation, pictures for us a hierarchy of galaxies with the names *ligyon, rahaton, karton* and *gostera*, telling us the precise number of stars attached to each of these galaxies. Artscroll computes or attempts to compute their total number: "*Ligyon, rahaton, karton* and *gostera* are titles for different officers [taken apparently from Roman military parlance] (Rashi), proceeding in a hierarchy from the higher to the lower levels (Ben Yehoyada). Each "officer," representing a system of stars or other heavenly bodies, controls numerous lower-level "officers" and their "divisions" beneath them, and so on. The lowest level "officers," the *gosteras*, numbering in the hundreds of millions (12x30x30x30x30x30), each has attached to it several billion stars (365 thousand myriad). This amounts to quadrillions of stars."

A talmid of mine through a strange happenstance was in the same car with Garrett Reisman, the only Jew to have lived on a space station for 90 days. He returned to earth a little over two years ago. And our talmid, upon learning that he was Jewish, asked if he had placed a mezuzah on the space station, not really expecting a positive answer. He was surprised when Reisman told him, "I did in fact affix a mezuzah on one of the posts of the space station."

At the same time, only in the last few years, the GPS has become part of us, it goes wherever we go. It can direct billions of people to billions of destinations instantaneously. It can tell a billion people at the same time all around the globe with absolute precision, how they can get to their destinations. And if any of them or all of them, for that matter, make a wrong turn, it will immediately change directions in a second for those billion people. Wherever you are, whether in China or Timbuktu or the Bronx, the itinerary will be changed; it knows exactly where you are.

In the last few years we have seen the Hadron Collider, which hopes for the first time to move at speeds faster than the speed of light. Theoretically it would take us back in time. We have reached a pass in history when we can think of going back in time. It is axiomatic in Judaism that the closer one gets to the past, the closer you come to *ma'amad har Sinai*, the closer you come to Hashem. *Chadesh ya'meinu k'kedem*. It's uncanny that the word Hadron, which is an acronym of scientific terms and parts that comprise this collider, is *hadron*, which means returning or going back.

Only a short while back, in the August 11, 2010, New York Times Blog Opinionator exclusive online commentary from the Times, Garry Gutting, a noted philosopher of our day, wrote a biting critique entitled, "On Dawkins' Atheism: A Response," and attempted to demonstrate that the scientific assertions that Dawkins made and the so called proofs that he conjured, were actually vulnerable and indeed could not stand the test of rigorous philosophical analysis. Without going into the itinerary of his thinking, Dawkins rejects Hashem's omniscience, and, not least of all, His ability to manage billions of people all at once.

Today the GPS can do it, so can the Almighty. We have reached an age where before things could only be ascribed to Elokim. Today, we are *me'at me'Elokim*.

Science, it has been recently reported, stands on the threshold of penetrating man's mind and the dreams of man as well to know what he is thinking – day or night, awake or asleep.

## Arim Gedolos U'Vetzuros BaShamayim: The Vilna Gaon and the Torah Temimah

The recent advance of science can also complicate or clarify biblical exegesis. The Torah tells us in Parshas Devarim (1:28) and then repeats word for word in Parshat Eikev (9:1) that in the upcoming battle against the seven nations who then held sway in Canaan-Eretz Yisrael, they would come against a formidable opponent whose cities are fortified to the heavens, *arim g'dolos uvetzuros bashamayim*. Rebbe Ami (*Chullin* 90b) wondered: How can there be cities in the heavens? The whole idea is preposterous! Therefore we derive from these pesukim that *dibra Torah b'lashon havai - b'lashon guzma* - that the Torah from time to time uses exaggeration to make a point. The *Sifrei*, interestingly enough makes a similar comment about hyperbole, but uses the verse in Eikev, not that of Devarim, as its proof.

The Vilna Gaon notices this anomaly and wonders why the authors of the *Sifrei* would use Eikev as the proof verse, when the pasuk first appeared earlier in Devarim? As a general principle, Chazal cite the first time the proof verse appears. Why in this instance does the *Sifrei* pass over the verse in Parshas Devarim and goes to Eikev? The Gaon therefore emends this midrash and leaves it with a



different text, *girsā*, altogether, whereby the *Sifrei* mentions first the pasuk in Devarim and then adds “that it can also be found in Eikev.”

However, the *Torah Temimah* (Devarim 1:28) demurred from the Gaon’s revision and said that Chazal, purposely cites the verse in Eikev deliberately skipping over its first mention because in Devarim the words were uttered by the *meraglim*, the notorious spies who searched the land of Canaan and brought back an altogether depressing and evil report about that land and are explicitly called liars by our Sages. How can you derive a teaching, says the *Torah Temimah*, from liars? So therefore, they skipped over that verse, went to Eikev, for there it was Moshe Rabbeinu who proclaimed *arim gedolos u’vetzuros BaShamayim*.

On the surface the *Torah Temimah*’s answer seems to be a brilliant reposte to the Gaon’s concerns.

However, in light of recent discoveries, how can we say that the pasuk in Devarim originally emanated from Moshe obviously speaking in Hashem’s name? Hashem is simultaneously *haya, hoveh v’yihiyeh* at once and knows that there would be *arim betzuros bashamayim*. Unless the pasuk refers specifically to cities on earth whose towers rise literally into the endless expanse of heaven, precisely because they are endless, the Gaon’s fixing of the text would not be problematic.

Having said all this, it is still only *me’at m’Elokim*. But *me’at* is hardly less than before and He remains approachable yet unbridgeable.

# The First Night of Sukkot: Is This Night Different?

Rabbi Joshua Flug

Director of Torah Research, Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future

Why is this night different from all other nights? This question, usually associated with the first night of Pesach, is not a question we would expect our children to ask on the first night of Sukkot. They might inquire about the holiday of Sukkot in general or about the idea of sitting in a sukkah. However, there is no event on the first night of Sukkot that would elicit a question about the unique nature of the meal in the Sukkah on the first night of Sukkot as opposed to all other meals that are eaten in the Sukkah. There is one exception: if it rains on the first night of Sukkot. A child may remember from previous years or may have learned in school that if it rains, there is no obligation to eat in the Sukkah. So if it does rain on the first night of Sukkot, the child may wonder why we delay our meal waiting for the rain to stop and if the rain keeps on falling, why we put on our raincoats and start our meal in the Sukkah. The answer to the child's question: this night is different from all other nights.

There is a unique obligation to eat bread in the Sukkah on the first night of Sukkot. One of the main applications of this obligation relates to rain on the first night of Sukkot. Yet, a further analysis of this obligation can provide us greater insight into the unique character of the first night of Sukkot as well as a deeper understanding of the mitzvah of living in the Sukkah. [Any discussion about the first night of Sukkot applies in the Diaspora to the first two nights of Sukkot. For presentational purposes, this article will refer to this obligation as an obligation of the first night.]

## The Mitzvah of Living in the Sukkah

The Torah states that we must live in the Sukkah for seven days:

*You shall live in the sukkah for seven days. All citizens of Israel shall live in sukkot.*

**Vayikra 23:42**

בסכת תשבו שבעת ימים כל האזרה בישראל ישבו  
בסכת.  
ויקרא כג:מב

How does one define “living” in the sukkah? Are there specific activities that one must perform in the sukkah in order to be considered “living” in the sukkah? Rambam (1138-1204) describes the mitzvah as follows:

*How does one fulfill the mitzvah to live in the sukkah? One should eat, drink and dwell in the sukkah all seven days, during the day and at night, the same way one lives in one's home the rest of the year. All seven days, one's house should be temporary and one's sukkah should be permanent as it states "You shall live in the sukkah for seven days." How is this accomplished? One's nice utensils and nice tablecloths should be brought to the sukkah ... it is prohibited to eat outside of the sukkah all seven days unless one eats a small amount, approximately the size of an egg. One may not sleep outside of the sukkah, even a nap. One may drink water and eat fruit outside of the sukkah, but one who is stringent and doesn't even drink water outside of the sukkah is praiseworthy.*

**Rambam, Hilchot Sukkah 6:5-6**

כיצד היא מצות הישיבה בסוכה, שיהיה אוכל ושונה ודר בסוכה כל שבעת הימים בין ביום בין בלילה כדרך שהוא דר בביתו בשאר ימות השנה, וכל שבעת הימים עושה אדם את ביתו עראי ואת סוכתו קבע שנאמר בסוכות תשבו שבעת ימים, כיצד כלים הנאים ומצעות הנאות בסוכה ... ואסור לאכול סעודה חוץ לסוכה כל שבעה אלא אם כן אכל אכילת עראי כביצה או פחות או יתר מעט, ואין ישנין חוץ לסוכה אפילו שינת עראי, ומותר לשתות מים ולאכול פירות חוץ לסוכה, ומי שיחמיר על עצמו ולא ישתה חוץ לסוכה אפילו מים הרי זה משובח.

**רמב"ם הל' סוכה ו:ה-ו**

Rambam's description teaches us in general terms that we should live in the sukkah, the same way we live in our homes. In providing the details, he describes the style of living in the sukkah and the activities that may not be performed outside of the sukkah. He does not mention any frequency required for activities that must be performed in the sukkah. In ordinary circumstances, if a person eats all meals in the sukkah and sleeps in the sukkah, that person is clearly living in the sukkah. However, when one considers some of the exemptions from sukkah, it becomes less clear. Let's take, for example, someone who doesn't generally eat bread or grains and relies on one of the leniencies presented by Rama (1520-1572), *Orach Chaim* 639:2 to exempt one from sleeping in the sukkah. It is possible for this person to spend his entire *chol hamoed* without actually entering the sukkah. Can we say the he is considered to be "living" in the sukkah?

To answer this question, let's explore the background to Rambam's formulation. The Mishna notes an important dispute between R. Eliezer and the rabbis regarding the required frequency of eating in the sukkah and the explanation of the dispute is provided by the Gemara:

**Mishna-R. Eliezer states:** *One must eat fourteen meals in the sukkah, one meal each day and one meal each night. The Chachamim state: there is no fixed amount except for the first nights. R. Eliezer further stated: One who did not eat on the first nights can make it up on the later nights. The Chachamim say that there is no makeup and on this the verse states "Mistakes cannot be fixed and an omission cannot be counted."*

**Gemara-** *What is the reason for R. Eliezer? "You shall live" should be similar to ordinary living. Just like ordinary living, people eat once during the day and once at night, so too, one must eat in the sukkah once each day and once each night. The Rabbis [are of the opinion] that just as ordinary living allows one to choose whether to eat or not, so too, regarding sukkah, one may choose whether to eat or not. If so, the same should*

רבי אליעזר אומר ארבע עשרה סעודות חייב אדם לאכול בסוכה, אחת ביום ואחת בלילה וחכמים אומרים אין לדבר קצבה חוץ מלילי יום טוב ראשון של חג בלבד ועוד אמר רבי אליעזר מי שלא אכל [לילי] יום טוב הראשון ישלים לילי יום טוב האחרון של חג וחכמים אומרים אין לדבר תשלומין ועל זה נאמר מעות לא יוכל לתקן וחסרון לא יוכל להמנות. גמרא. מאי טעמא דרבי אליעזר תשבו כעין תדורו מה דירה אחת ביום ואחת בלילה אף סוכה אחת ביום ואחת בלילה ורבנן כדירה מה דירה אי בעי אכיל אי בעי לא אכיל אף סוכה נמי אי בעי אכיל אי בעי לא אכיל

apply on the first nights [and one should not be required to eat]? R. Yochanan said in the name of R. Shimon b. Yehotzadak: it states “the fifteenth” here (regarding sukkah) and it states “the fifteenth” regarding the holiday of Pesach. Just like there, the first night is obligatory and the rest is optional, so too here, the first night is obligatory and the rest is optional.

**Sukkah 27a**

אי הכי אפילו לילי יום טוב ראשון נמי אמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יהוצדק נאמר כאן חמשה עשר ונאמר חמשה עשר בחג המצות מה להלן לילה הראשון חובה מכאן ואילך רשות אף כאן לילה הראשון חובה מכאן ואילך רשות.

**סוכה כז.**

R. Eliezer and the Chachamim agree that the mitzvah of living in the sukkah must reflect ordinary living. According to R. Eliezer, this means that one must eat fourteen meals in the sukkah as eating two meals per day is part of ordinary living. The Chachamim are of the opinion that ordinary living must include the option to skip meals. The only exception is the first night because we derive from a hermeneutical principle that the first night of Sukkot parallels the first night of Pesach.

One must then examine the nature of the obligation to eat a meal in the sukkah on the first night of Sukkot according to the Chachamim. Is this obligation an exception to the ordinary rules of living in the sukkah? Is it a separate obligation unrelated the normal obligations associated with living in the sukkah?

## The Nature of the Obligation on the First Night

Many Rishonim ask the following question regarding the obligation of eating in the sukkah on the first night of Sukkot: At every Yom Tov meal there is an obligation to eat bread. Accordingly, there is an obligation to eat bread on the first night of Sukkot. Being that all bread meals must be eaten in the sukkah, why is there a need for a separate obligation to eat bread in the sukkah on the first night of Sukkot? Isn't one required to eat every Yom Tov meal in the sukkah?

Tosafot, *Berachot* 49b s.v. *Ee Ba'I*, quote Rabbeinu Yehuda who suggests that this special obligation is necessary for a situation where it rains for part of the first night of Sukkot. The ordinary obligation to eat one's meals in the sukkah does not apply when it is raining. Furthermore, if one started a meal inside while it was raining and then the rain stopped, there is no obligation to finish one's meal in the sukkah (*Tosefta, Sukkah* 2:5). According to Rabbeinu Yehuda, this exemption would not apply on the first night of Sukkot. Since there is a specific obligation to eat in the sukkah on the first night of Sukkot, if it stopped raining in the middle of one's meal, one would be required to subsequently go out to the sukkah and eat bread in the sukkah. [See the comments of the Vilna Gaon to *Orach Chaim* 639:5, for further explanation of Rabbeinu Yehuda's opinion.]

It is clear from the comments of Rabbeinu Yehuda that there is no obligation to eat in the rain even on the first night of Sukkot. According to Rabbeinu Yehuda, if it rains the entire first night of Sukkot, one is exempt from this obligation. However, Rabbeinu Asher (c. 1250-1327), *Berachot* 7:23, offers a different approach. He suggests that the obligation to eat bread in the sukkah on the first night of Sukkot is independent of the normal obligations of the sukkah. The exemption from eating in the sukkah while it is raining is based on the fact that it is not considered ordinary living to eat in a dwelling when water is coming in. The exemption applies to the obligation to live in the

sukkah. However, the obligation to eat in the sukkah on the first night of sukkah is not a function of living in the Sukkah, but rather an independent obligation to eat bread in a sukkah and therefore, one must eat bread in the sukkah on the first night even if it is raining.

Rabbeinu Nissim (c. 1320-1380), *Sukkah* 12b, s.v. *Matnitin*, presents a third approach. The Mishna, *Sukkah* 26b, states that one is permitted to eat less than a *k'beitza* (the size of an egg) outside of the sukkah. A *k'beitza* is much larger than the *k'zayit* (the size of an olive) that is normally required for the Yom Tov meal. Rabbeinu Nissim suggests that in theory, one is not obligated to eat the Yom Tov meal in the sukkah provided that he only eats a *k'zayit* of bread. Therefore, there is a necessity for a special obligation to eat bread in the sukkah on the first night of Sukkot. Rabbeinu Nissim then presents a question as to whether one must eat a *k'beitzah* or a *k'zayit* on the first night. He explains that the obligation on the first night of Sukkot is to eat a fixed meal in the sukkah, one that would be obligatory throughout Sukkot. He is just not sure whether the definition of a fixed meal follows the standard definition or whether the obligation on the first night transforms even a *k'zayit* of bread into a fixed meal. It is clear from the comments of Rabbeinu Nissim that if it is raining on the first night, one is exempt from sitting in the sukkah as the obligation on the first night is reflective of the ordinary obligation to live in the Sukkah.

From a practical perspective, Rama, *Orach Chaim* 639:5, rules in accordance with the opinion of Rabbeinu Asher that if it is raining on the first night of Sukkot, one should eat a *k'zayit* of bread in the sukkah. *Mishna Berurah* 639:35, notes that although Rama does seem to rule conclusively on the matter, one should be concerned for the many Rishonim who maintain that one cannot fulfill the mitzvah of the first night while it is raining. Therefore, one should not recite the *beracha* of *Leishev BaSukkah* if it is raining because according to these Rishonim there is absolutely no fulfillment of any mitzvah. Furthermore, it is preferable to wait for the rain to stop in order to fulfill the mitzvah according to all opinions.

## Rambam's Opinion

Rambam does not directly address the issue of what to do if it rains on the first night of Sukkot. Yet, his formulation about the nature of the obligation on the first night seems to provide us with a fourth approach:

*Eating in the sukkah on the first nights is obligatory. One fulfills his obligation by eating the size of an olive. The rest of the days, it is optional, if one wants to eat a meal one must do so in the sukkah, if one does not want to eat a meal the other seven days, but rather eat fruit or nuts outside of the sukkah, one may do so, just like the rule of eating matzah.*

**Rambam, Hilchot Sukkah 6:7**

אכילה בלילי יום טוב הראשון בסוכה  
חובה אפילו אכל כזית פת יצא ידי  
חובתו מכאן ואילך רשות רצה לאכול  
סעודה סועד בסוכה רצה אינו אוכל כל  
שבעה אלא פירות או קליות חוץ לסוכה  
אוכל כדין אכילת מצה.  
רמב"ם הל' סוכה ו:ז

There are a number of questions one can ask regarding Rambam's formulation. First, being that the obligation is derived from the obligation of eating matzah on Pesach, one would expect that Rambam would have formulated this obligation in a similar way to his formulation of the obligation to eat matzah. In *Hilchot Chametz UMatzah* 6:1, Rambam writes “מצות עשה מן התורה לאכול מצה בליל חמשה עשר

fifteenth.” Yet, regarding the obligation to eat in the sukkah on the fifteenth of Tishrei, Rambam does not state that it is a positive commandment, but simply an obligation. Why does he present a different formulation? Second, Rambam places the obligation to eat in the sukkah in the middle of the rules of what one must do in the sukkah and what one may do outside of the sukkah. Why does Rambam include this obligation on the list? Isn't the obligation on the first night an exception to the rule or an independent obligation? Third, why does Rambam state “just like the rule of eating matzah” in the second half of the formulation which deals with the permissibility of avoiding bread during the rest of Sukkot? Shouldn't he have compared sukkah to matzah in the first half where he states that one must eat bread on the first night?

To answer these questions, perhaps one can suggest that Rambam does not see the obligation to eat bread in the sukkah on the first night of Sukkot as an independent obligation or an exception to the rule. According to Rambam, the Chachamim agree fundamentally with R. Eliezer that in order to establish oneself as living in the sukkah, one should be obligated to eat a specified number of meals in the sukkah. However, the Chachamim derive from the laws of matzah that this can be accomplished by eating a single meal on the first night of Sukkot. Once one eats the first meal in the sukkah, he is considered “living” in the sukkah provided that he follows the other rules of what activities must be performed in the sukkah. The derivation from matzah is just as much an exemption from eating the other thirteen meals in the sukkah as it is an obligation to eat the first meal.

As such, we can understand why Rambam formulated the obligation to eat in the sukkah on the first night in this manner. The obligation of the first night is not a mitzvah that is independent of the mitzvah to live in the sukkah throughout Sukkot. Therefore, he does not write “there is a positive obligation to eat in the sukkah on the fifteenth of Tishrei.” Since it is a detail of the general mitzvah to live in the sukkah, it is appropriately placed on the list of what one must do in the sukkah and what one may do outside of the sukkah. Just as Rambam lists *what* activities require a sukkah, he also lists *when* certain activities are obligatory. The obligation to eat in the sukkah on the first night is not the exception to the rule, but more of a defining feature of the rule. If anything, the exemption to eat a meal the rest of Sukkot is the exception to the rule. This is also why Rambam states “just like the rule of eating matzah” at the end of his formulation. Since the derivation from the laws of matzah applies to the thirteen meals that one is not required to eat in the sukkah, it makes sense to equate this aspect of sukkah to matzah.

It is unclear how this approach is applied to a situation where it is raining on the first night of Sukkot. On the one hand, one can argue that since the purpose of eating in the sukkah on the first night is to establish oneself as living in the sukkah, one should eat even if it is raining. Although there won't be a fulfillment of any mitzvah, it will serve the purpose of establishing one's home as the sukkah for the next seven days. On the other hand, one can argue that one can only establish the sukkah as one's home by fulfilling the normal obligations of sukkah. When it is raining, that cannot be accomplished. Perhaps rain is one of the situations where the Chachamim state that the missed opportunity cannot be made up and establishing oneself as living in the sukkah might only be accomplished passively (i.e. by avoiding violation of the other rules).

# The Educational Component of the First Night

The first night of Pesach is a night which focuses on teaching children about the exodus from Egypt. Does the equation of the first night of Sukkot to the first night of Pesach also include an educational component? While the formal mitzvah of *maggid* (recounting the exodus) does not apply, there is an element of education related to the sukkah. When the Torah presents the mitzvah of living in the sukkah, it states:

*In order that your descendants will know that I placed the Jewish people in sukkot when I took them out of the Land of Egypt, I am the Lord your God.*

**Vayikra 23:43**

למען ידעו דרתיכם כי בסכות הושבתי  
את בני ישראל בהוציא אותם מארץ  
מצרים אני ה' אלקיכם.  
**ויקרא כג:מג**

The Gemara, *Sukkah* 11b, records in a *beraita*, a dispute between R. Eliezer and R. Akiva regarding the meaning of “I placed the Jewish people in sukkot.” According to R. Eliezer, this refers to the clouds of glory. According to R. Akiva, this refers to the actual huts that the Jewish people lived in while in the desert. While the ramifications of this dispute seem to be limited to biblical interpretation, R. Yoel Sirkes (1561-1640), *Bach, Orach Chaim* no. 625, suggests that the dispute is relevant to anyone who wants to properly fulfill the mitzvah of living in the sukkah. R. Sirkes notes that since the Torah states that the purpose of the mitzvah of sukkah is to teach future generations about the sukkah experience that the Jewish people experienced in the desert, knowing what experience the Torah refers to is very relevant.

R. Ya'akov Ettlinger (1798-1871) takes this idea one step further:

*Regarding sukkah, where the verse states that one must have specific thoughts [as we learn from] “in order that your descendants will know,” an idea advanced by Bach, it is possible that even ex post facto, one [who did not contemplate this idea] has not fulfilled the requirement. This is similar to what was said that one who did say these three things on Pesach has not fulfilled his obligation.*

*Therefore, if one ate on the first night and did not think about the meaning behind the sukkah, he should eat another [piece of bread] the size of an olive with this idea in mind. At the very least, everyone should make sure on the first night to teach their children and members of the household about the reasons of the sukkah just as one should teach them the reasons for the commandments on Pesach.*

**Bikkurei Ya'akov, 625:3**

בסוכה, שציווי הכתוב הוא  
שיכוון כן מלמען ידעו כמש"כ  
הב"ח, י"ל דאפילו בדיעבד לא  
יצא וכדאמרין כל שלא אמר ג'  
דברים אלו בפסח לא יצא ידי  
חובתו. ולכן אם אכל בלילה  
ראשונה בסוכה בלא כוונה זו,  
יש להחמיר לאכול שוב כזית  
בכוונה. ועכ"פ יזהר כל א' ללמד  
ולספר לבניו ולבני ביתו בלילה  
ראשונה כוונת מצות סוכה, כמו  
שצריך ללמד להם טעם המצות  
בליל פסח.

**בכורי יעקב תרכה:ג**

According to R. Ettlinger, the comparison between the first night of Sukkot and the first night of Pesach extends beyond eating to understanding the reasons behind the mitzvot of the night. Why does this educational component apply specifically on the first night? If the intent of the Torah in stating “in order that your descendants will know” is to associate understanding the mitzvah with the mitzvah itself, why isn't this required every time one enters the sukkah?

Based on the approach to explain Rambam, one can suggest that since the purpose of the obligation to eat in the sukkah on the first night is to establish oneself as living in the sukkah, it is also the time to establish the purpose of living in the sukkah. Once one declares his purpose of living in the sukkah, it remains with him throughout Sukkot. Although the other rishonim don't necessarily follow this approach to understanding the obligation to eat in the sukkah on the first night, they may agree that the independent obligation or exception does serve an additional goal of establishing oneself and one's purpose for living in the sukkah.

Weather permitting, the child may not notice that this night is different. Yet, we don't need rain or other inclement weather to have a meaningful discussion about the unique nature of the first night, the sukkah experience of the Jews in the desert, or the sukkah as a representation of God's Divine providence. Like Pesach, Sukkot has a unique educational component and if we take advantage of the opportunity, it can greatly enhance our own sukkah experience.



# ופרוס עלינו סוכת שלומך

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## מהות הסוכה

במוצאי יום הכיפורים יוצאת בת קול שמכריזה ואומרת, "לך אכול בשמחה לחמך ושתה בלב טוב יינך, כי כבר רצה הא-לוקים את מעשיך" (קהלת ט). את הפסוק הזה דורשים חז"ל במדרש רבה על קהלת-

"ר מונא דישאב ור יהושע דסכנין בשם רבי לוי פתר קרייא בראש השנה וביום הכפורים, משל למדינה

שהיתה חייבת מיסים למלך שלח המלך גבאי טימיון לגבותה ברחוק עשרה מילין יצאו גדולי המדינה

וקלסוהו והתיר להם שלישי, ברחוק חמשה מילין יצאו הבינונים וקלסוהו והתיר להם שלישי, כשקרר

יצאו לקראתו אנשים ונשים וטף וקלסוהו ומחל להם את הכל. אמר לון מה דאזל אזל מן הכא ולהלן הוא

חושבנא, כך ערב ראש השנה גדולי הדור מתעניין הקב"ה מתיר להם שלישי מעונותיהם שנאמר (תהלים

ק' ל) כי עמך הסליחה למען תורא... ואותן הימים שבין ראש השנה ליום הכפורים היחידים

מתעניין... אנשים ונשים וטף מחל להם הקב"ה את הכל, ואומר מה דאזל אזל מן הכא ולהלן הוא

חושבנא, יצתה בת קול ואומרת להם לך אכול בשמחה לחמך כבר נשמעה תפלתכם"

קהלת רבה (וילנא) פרשה ט ד"ה א [ז] לך

לומדים אנו מפורש בדברי חז"ל שהדין מסתיים במוצאי יו"כ, משום שהבת קול היוצאת במוצאי יום הכיפורים אומרת לנו שמה שהיה היה ומעכשיו מתחילים חשבון חדש. מצד שני המשנה במסכת סוכה (כח). מלמדת אותנו שאם ירדו גשמים בחג הסוכות אז עוזבים את הסוכה, והמשנה מסבירה שהדבר דומה, "לעבד שבא למזוג כוס לרבו ושפך לו קיתון על פניו". רש"י, שם על המשנה, מסביר "ושפך לו קיתון על פניו" זה קיתון של מים. ומקשה על זה הגר"א, הרי העבד בא למזוג כוס לרבו מוזגים יין ולא מים ומניין יש למלך קיתון של מים שאותו שפך על פני העבד?

הגר"א מסביר שהעבד בא עם מים, משום שלמלך כבר יש יין, אבל היין של המלך כל כך כבד שאי אפשר לשתות אותו. ולכן העבד בא עם המים כדי למזג את היין ביחד עם המים כדי שהמלך יוכל לשתות את היין.

אבל, כאשר המלך כועס על העבד הוא לוקח את קיתון המים ושופך על פני העבד. כשזה קורה זה סימן קללה לעבד משום שהמלך כועס עליו, וזה לא טוב למלך משום שעכשיו המלך נשאר עם יין כבד שאי אפשר לשתות אותו כך.

כך ראש השנה ויו"כ הם ימים נוראים וכבדים, כמו היין הכבד של המלך. סוכות הם ימי שמחה, ובלשון הגר"א סוכות הם, "ימי המתקת הדינים". לכן כשלא יורד גשם בסוכות בארץ ישראל זה סימן ברכה, משום שזה מסמל שהקב"ה קיבל את תשובותינו וימי הדין משתלביים יחד עם הימים הנפלאים של סוכות, כמו שהיין הכבד משתלב עם המים. אבל אם, חס ושלום, יורד גשם בחג הסוכות בארץ ישראל פירוש הדבר שהמלך שפך את המים על הפנים של העבד ונשאר למלך רק את היין הכבד שזה סימן קללה.

לכן אם לא יורד גשם בארץ ישראל עד הושענא רבה זה סימן ברכה שה' קיבל את תפילותינו, אם כן יוצא שעלינו להמתין עד הושענא רבה כדי לדעת שהמתקנו את הדין. יוצא שימי הדין מסתיימים לא במוצאי יו"כ אלא בהושענא רבה. ויש כאן סתירה בדברי חז"ל, שמצד אחד מסתיימים ימי הדין במוצאי יו"כ עם קריאת הבת קול שאומרת, "לך אכול בשמחה לחמך ושתה בלב טוב יינך, כי כבר רצה הא-לוקים את מעשיך". ומצד שני מסביר לנו הגר"א שימי הדין מסתיימים בהושענא רבה, כמו שידוע לנו. א"כ מתי באמת מסתיימים ימי הדין, במוצאי יו"כ או בהושענא רבה?

שאלה נוספת, נאמר בנחמיה פרק ח, יז נאמר "ויעשו כל הקהל השבים מן השבי סכות וישבו בסכות כי לא עשו מימי ישוע בן נון כן בני ישראל עד היום ההוא ותהי שמחה גדולה מאד."

הגמרא בערכין (לב:): מקשה על הפסוק ואומרת, "אפשר בא דוד ולא עשו סוכות?!" האם יתכן שמימי יהושע לא עשו סוכות? הרי אנו אומרים בברכת המזון, "הרחמן יקים לנו את סוכת דוד הנופלת." אלא מסבירה הגמרא, "דבעי רחמי על יצר ע"ז ובטליה ואגין זכותה עליהו כסוכה." פירוש, שכשעלה עזרא לארץ הוא ביקש מהקב"ה שיבטל את יצר הרע של ע"ז, והקב"ה הסכים לבקשתו. והמעשה הזה שהקב"ה ביטל את יצר הרע של ע"ז בימי עזרא מגן עלינו כמו סוכה. אם כן, שאלתינו השניה היא, איך סוכה מסמלת ביטול יצר הרע של ע"ז בימי עזרא?

שאלה שלישית, נאמר בבראשית פרק כד א, "וה' ברך את אברהם בכל", והגר"א, על מסכת סוכה, מספר לנו שכשבאו תלמידיו לבקרו בסוכות שאל אותם, 'מנין שקיים אברהם אבינו מצוות סוכה?' וכששאל הגר"א את השאלה הזאת לתלמידיו לא היה אחד שיכל להשיב לו. הסיבה שלא יכלו להשיב לו על זה היא פשוטה שהרי ידוע לנו שמצוות סוכה התחילה רק אחרי יציאת מצרים, ואברהם אבינו חי הרבה לפני כן.

משיב להם הגר"א שנאמר במדרש על הפסוק, "וה' ברך את אברהם בכל" בכל-זה סוכה. ויהיו כמתמיהים, ויאמר **בכ"ל** ראשי תיבות [של שלשת הפסוקים בתורה שמדברים על סוכה], "בסכות תשבו שבעת ימים," כל האזרה בישראל ישבו בסכות," "למען ידעו דרותיכם כי בסוכות הושבתי את בני ישראל".

ואף על פי שהגר"א מחבר כאן את הפסוקים בצורה נפלאה עדיין לא מובן מה הקשר בין אברהם אבינו וסוכה. הרי הכל יודעים שהמצווה לישב בסוכה התחילה רק כשעם ישראל יצא ממצרים ולא לפני כן. א"כ למה התכוון הגר"א כאשר אמר שאברהם אבינו קיים את מצוות סוכה?

כדי להבין סוגיא זו נעיין היכן הפעם הראשונה שהוזכרה סוכה בתורה, בבראשית פרק לג, פרשת וישלח כאשר יעקב נפרד בשלום מעשיו הבא להורגו:

*יַעֲקֹב נָא אֲדֹנָי לִפְנֵי עַבְדּוֹ וְאֲנִי אֶתְנַהֲלָה לְאִשֵּׁי לְרָגְלֵי הַמְּלָאכָה אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי וְלְרָגְלֵי הַיְלָדִים עַד אֲשֶׁר אָבֹא אֶל אֲדֹנָי שְׁעִירָה: וַיֹּאמֶר עֲשׂוּ אֲצִיגָה נָא עִמָּךְ מִן הָעַם אֲשֶׁר אִתִּי וַיֹּאמֶר לְמָה זֶה אֲמַצָּא חֵן בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנָי: וַיֵּשֶׁב בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא עֲשׂוּ לְדַרְכּוֹ שְׁעִירָה: וַיַּעֲקֹב נָסַע סִכְתָּה וַיָּבֶן לֹו בַּיִת וַלְמַקְנָהוּ עָשָׂה סִכְתָּה עַל בֶּן קְרָא שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם סִכּוֹת:*

בפסוקים אלה אנו לומדים שיעקב נסע סוכותה וקרא למקום סוכות. ועלינו להבין הרי דברי התורה הם לנצח נצחים ולדורי דורות, אם כן למה חשוב לתורה לציין שיעקב, אחר שנפרד מעשיו, נסע סוכותה וקרא למקום סוכות?

כדומה לזה נאמר ב **במדבר פרק לג**, פרשת מסעי:

*אֵלֶּה מִסְעֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יָצְאוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְצִבְיָתָם בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן: וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת מוֹצְאֵיהֶם לְמִסְעֵיהֶם עַל פִּי ה' וְאֵלֶּה מִסְעֵיהֶם לְמוֹצְאֵיהֶם: וַיִּסְעוּ מֵרַעַמְסֵס בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן בְּחַמְשָׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן מִמִּזְרַח הַפָּסֶחַ יָצְאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיַד רָמָה לְעֵינֵי כָל מִצְרַיִם: וַיִּסְעוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵרַעַמְסֵס וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּסִכְתָּה:*

גם כאן השאלה מתבקשת, למה מענין אותנו שעם ישראל נסע מרעמסס לסוכות, הרי העיקר הוא שעם ישראל יצא ממצרים. מה ראתה התורה לציין שעם ישראל נסע דווקא לסוכות?

התשובה לשאלתינו היא, שכהקב"ה עושה עמנו חסדים, והוא עושה עמנו הרבה חסדים, עלינו להודות להלל ולשבח על כך בכל עת ערב בבוקר ובצהריים; אבל זה לא מספיק, משום שאנחנו גם צריכים לבקש מהקב"ה שיתן לנו את השכל לשמור על המתנה שנתן לנו. והסיבה לכך היא כי אם לא נדע לשמור על המתנה נאבד אותה, כי כמו שהקב"ה נותן הוא גם יכול לקחת, ויש לנו הרבה דוגמאות לדבר. למשל, במלחמת ששת הימים זכינו, בחסדי ה', שהרחיב ה' את גבולינו כמו שנאמר, "וּפְרַצְתָּ יָמָה וְקִדְמָה וְצַפְנָה וְנִגְבָּה" ומתנה נפלאה זו קיבלנו מה' יתברך. והנה היום, לאחר שנים לא רבות, איבדנו חלק מהמתנה הזאת משום שלא ידענו איך לשמור עליה ולכן כשה' נותן לנו מתנות אם אמירת התודה עלינו גם לבקש שיהי לנו את התבונה שדרכה נוכל לשמור על המתנה, כי אין גאולה בלי שמירה. והרעיון הזה מתבטא בצורה נפלאה במסכת ברכות (ד:): בצורה הכי ברורה.

כתוב שם שצריך לסמוך גאולה לתפילה. פירוש הדבר, שאחרי ברכת גאל ישראל צריך לעמוד בתפילה שואלת הגמרא, "ואי אמרת לסמוך הא לא קא סמך גאולה לתפילה (בתפילת ערבית) דבעי למימר השכבינו"

עונה הגמרא, "כיוון דתקיננו רבנן השכיבנו (לאחר גאל ישראל) כגאולה אריכתא דמיא." והקושי בדברי הגמרא היא מה היא כוונתה שהשכיבנו זה חלק מגאל ישראל. אלא ההסבר הוא כפי שאמרנו שכל גאולה צריכה שמירה, ולכן תפילת השכיבנו חותמת עם המילים "שומר עמו ישראל לעד" כדי ללמדינו שאין גאל ישראל בלי שיהיה שומר עמו ישראל. והדבר שמבטא את השמירה יותר מכל דבר היא הסוכה משום שבסוכה צריך לשבת "תשבו כעין תדורו." כלומר, שצריך להכניס את כל הבית לסוכה, ומצד שני הסוכה היא מקום פתוח בלי דלתות ולא מוגן ולמרות זאת אנחנו נשמרים על ידי הבורא עולם. וזאת הסיבה שברכת השכיבנו המסתיימת במילים, "שומר עמו ישראל עד" (שזו היא השמירה הבאה אחר הגאולה) נאמר בברכת זו, "ופרוס עלינו סוכת שלומך" הואיל והסוכה מסמלת שמירה.

אם כן כשיעקב אבינו נפרד מעשיו הוא מודה לה' יתברך שהציל אותו מיד אחיו. אבל יעקב אבינו לא מסתפק רק בהודאה, אלא יעקב מבקש מהקב"ה שההצלה והגאולה שזכה לה, שניצל מעשיו, תישמר גם לדורות הבאים. ובקשה זו של יעקב התבטאה בכך שלאחר שניצל מעשיו הוא הלך לסוכות, כי הסוכה מסמלת את השמירה. כמו כן, גם כאשר ישראל נגאלים ממצרים הם נוסעים מרעמסס לסוכות כדי שגאולתם תישמר לדורות ולא ישובו יותר מצרימה. לכן מתברר לנו בצורה נפלאה שמצד אחד ימי הדין מסתיימים במוצאי יום הכיפורים אבל זה רק החלק של "גאל ישראל", נמחלו עוונותינו, אך השמירה לגאולה הזו מתבררת בהושענא רבה שאם עד אז לא ירדו גשמים סימן הוא משמים שיצרנו שילוב בין גאולה לשמירה.

זאת הסיבה שכאשר עזרא עלה ארצה עם עולי בבל והיתה זו שעת גאולה רצה עזרא לשמר את הגאולה הזאת והוא שאל את עצמו, מה קרה בימי יהושע, בגאולה הראשונה, שגאולה זו נאבדה ולא נשארה לנצח ויצאנו לגלות בבל. ומגלה לנו הגמרא בערכין שבימי יהושע זו היתה גאולה בלי שמירה, כי יהושע היה צריך לבקש, אחר כיבוש הארץ וחלוקתה, מבורא עולם שיתן לנו את היכולת לשמור על הגאולה על ידי שיבטל יצר הרע של ע"ז. שזה עמד מעוכרינו דורי דורות והואיל ויהושע לא ביקש זאת לא נשמרה הגאולה ויצאנו לגלות.

וכשעלה עזרא מבבל הוא ביקש מבורא עולם שלגאולה השניה תהיה שמירה, וכפי שכבר אמרנו שהדבר שמבטא את השמירה יותר מכל זו היא הסוכה. וזאת כוונת הפסוק, "ויעשו כל הקהל השבים מן השבי סכות וישבו בסכות כי לא עשו מימי ישוע בן נון כן בני ישראל עד היום ההוא ותהי שמחה גדולה מאד." [ומה שבית המקדש השני בכל זאת נחרב למרות השמירה היא משום שעזרא לא דמיין לעצמו כשעליו לבקש שלא תהיה שנאת חנם שבגללה נחרב הבית השני.]

כאן אנו באים ליישב את שאלתינו הנוספת, איך אברהם אבינו קיים מצוות סוכה. ההסבר הוא, אברהם אבינו, כל חייו, כל ברכה והצלחה שקיבל מבורא עולם, הוא ביקש שיהיה לו את היכולת לשמור את המתנה שקיבל. שני פעמים בלבד בתנ"ך מצאנו את המילים, "לך לך" ושניהם נאמרו לאברהם אבינו. בפעם הראשונה נאמר, "לך לך מארצך מארץ מולדתך" והפעם השניה, והאחרונה, נאמר לאברהם, "לך לך אל אחד ההרים אשר אומר אליך" בהליכה לעקדת יצחק. אברהם כל חייו הלך והתקדם ולא נסג אחור כך שזה יצר שמירה על כל המתנות שבואר עולם נתן לו. ולכן כל חייו היו חיים שהיה בהם שילוב של גאולה ושמירה שמכח זה זכה לברכה. כל חייו היו בחינת סוכה שידע לשמור את המתנות שבואר עולם נתן לו ומימש את רעיון הסוכה, שמסמלת שמירה.

לכן כבר ביו"כ, יום גאולתם של ישראל, אנו מזכירים את הסוכה שהיא מבטאת את השמירה לגאולה. בהפטרות מנחה נאמר בספר יונה פרק ד:

**"וַיֵּצֵא יוֹנָה מִן הַקָּיִץ וַיֵּשֶׁב מִקֶּדֶם לְעִיר וַיַּעַשׂ לוֹ שֵׁם סֹכָה וַיֵּשֶׁב תַּחְתֶּיהָ בְּצַל עֵד אֲשֶׁר יֵרָאֶה מֵה יָמֶיהָ קָעִיר":**

והקושי בפסוק הרי ברור כאשר יונה בנה סוכה הוא עשה זאת כדי לשבת בצילה, הרי הוא לא התכוון לשבת בחוץ לסוכה. אם כן אז מדוע הפסוק אומר, "וישב תחתיה בצל"? אומר על כך הגר"א בפירושו על ספר יונה, שכל השנה אנו חיים במקום שנקרא "תחת השמש", וזהו המקום שבו מתנהלים חיי האדם. אמנם שבוע אחד בשנה אנחנו לא יושבים תחת השמש אלא אנו מתבקשים לשבת במקום ש"צילתה מרובה מחמתה", וזו היא הסוכה. המשמעות היא לשבת בצילו של בורא עולם, ובכך תהיה לנו שמירה לכל השנה. ולכן האדם שבנה את המקדש נקרא בצלאל, וחז"ל אומרים עליו שהוא נקרא כך משום שהוא היה בצל קל.

ומענין שבשו"ע מובא דעה, "כתבו הראשונים ז"ל שיש סימן בצל הלבנה בליל הושענא רבה מה שיקרה לו או לקרוביו באותה השנה; ויש מי שכתב שאין לדקדק בזה, כדי שלא ליתרע מזליה, גם כי רבים אינם מבינים הענין על בוריו; ויותר טוב להיות תמים ולא לחקור עתידות כך נראה לי (שו"ע או"ח סימן תרסד סעיף א)."

המקור לכך נמצא בפרשת שלח לך אצל חטא המרגלים. כשהמרגלים חוזרים אל עם ישראל יהושע וכלב אומרים לעם שאין להם מה להיבהל מיושבי הארץ משום ש"סר צלם מעליהם וה' איתנו" כנאמר:

*"ויהושע בן נון וכלב בן יפנה מן התרים את הארץ קרעו בגדיהם: ויאמרו אל כל עדת בני ישראל לאמר הארץ אשר עברנו בה לתור אלה טובה הארץ מאד מאד: אם תפץ בנו יקנן והביא אתנו אל הארץ הזאת ונתנה לנו ארץ אשר הוא זבת חלב ודבש: אך בה אל תמרדו ואתם אל תיראו את עם הארץ כי לחמנו הם סר צלם מעליהם וה' אתנו אל תיראם"*

**במדבר פרק יד**

רש"י מסביר על "סר צלם מעליהם וה' אתנו" שסר צילו של הקב"ה מעליהם. ומוסיף על זה הרמב"ן שזה בא לרמוז שצל ה' סר מעליהם ב"ליל החותם", כלומר בליל הושענא רבה. ממשיך שם הרמב"ן לומר שבהושענא רבה, "לא יהיה צל לראש האיש אשר ימות בשנה ההיא". וכך אמרו יהושע וכלב לעם ש"סר צילם מעליהם" פירושו הדבר שנגזר על יושבי הארץ מיתה הואיל וסר מעליהם שמירתו של בורא עולם.

אחר שראינו את עמוק מהותה של הסוכה, שמסמלת שמירה, עלינו לשאול את עצמינו איך אפשר לזכות בשמירה של הסוכה לכל השנה? כדי שנבין את זה מלמד אותנו הגרא ב"אדרת אליהו" בפרשת עקב, שלקב"ה ישנם שלשה שליחים שאיתם הוא עושה את כל עבודתו בעולם הזה ואלו הם: מים, רוח, ואש.

לפעמים הקב"ה משתמש בשליח אחד, לפעמים בכמה שליחים ולפעמים בכלם. בדור המבול הקב"ה השתמש בשליח שנקרא מים, והמים עושים את שליחותם בצורה הרסנית שלא נשאר כלום מדור המבול.

בדור הפלגה מיליוני בני אדם ניסו לבנות מגדל שיגיע לכסאו של הקב"ה כדי למרוד בו יתברך. והקב"ה בלל את שפתם ופיזר אותם בכל העולם. וכדי לבצע את זה הקב"ה השתמש בשליח שנקרא רוח, והרוח פיזרה את דור הפלגה בכל העולם בבת אחת.

ובסדום הקב"ה השתמש בשליחו הנקרא אש, שה' שרף את סדום ועמרה.

ומוסיף הגר"א ומסביר שבמכת הברד הקב"ה השתמש בכל שליחיו בבת אחת שנאמר,

*"וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה הִשְׁפֵּם בַּבֶּקֶר וְהִתְיַצֵּב לְפָנַי פָּרְעוֹה וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו כֹּה אָמַר ה' אֱלֹהֵי הָעֶבְרִים שְׁלַח אֶת עַמִּי וַיַּעֲבְדוּנִי. כִּי בַּפֶּעַם הַזֹּאת אֲנִי שֹׁלֵחַ אֶת כָּל מַגְפָּתַי אֵל לִבְךָ וּבְעֶבְדֶיךָ וּבְעַמֶּיךָ בְּעִבּוֹר תַּדַּע כִּי אֵין כְּמִנִּי כָּל הָאָרֶץ:"*

## שמות פרק ט, פרשת וירא

שבתוך הברד היה אש ומים, והרוח העבירה את מכה זו בכל ארץ מצרים. אם כן, אז כמה נפלא הדבר שכאשר נברא העולם נאמר, "הוא אמר ויהי". ואם נעיין נראה שהמילה "אמר" היא ראשי תיבות לאש, מים, ורוח שהם השליחי הקב"ה. כשה' אומר משהו, אז שליחיו יוצאים ועושים את רצונו. כוחות הללו לא נמצאים רק אצל הקב"ה אלא גם אצלנו, משום שנבראנו בצלם א-לוקים.

לכן כשאנחנו מדברים יוצא מפינו הבל-חמימות, בחורף שקר בחוץ אנחנו מקרבים את הידיים לפה כדי להתחמם, שזה מסמל את האש. רוק, שאדם יורק מפיו שזה מסמל את המים. ושאדם מדבר יוצא מהפיו אוויר, וזה הרוח. ויוצא מזה שיש לנו את הכוחות של אש, מים ורוח, שהם שליחי הקב"ה.

מוסיף הגר"א, ב"אדרת אליהו", מלמדים אותנו חז"ל "שמי שפרע מדור המבול ומדור הפלגה ומאנשי סדום יפרע ממי שלא עומד בדיבורו". כלומר אדם שהבטיח לעשות משהו חייב לעמוד בדיבורו ולקיים את מה שהבטיח, "כי הדיבור מורכב משלש אלה אש מים ואוויר ולכן [אם לא יעמוד בדיבורו או יענש] יבא עליו שלשה פרעונות אלו". וזאת אומרת שהפרענויות שבאו על דור המבול, דור הפלגה ועל אנשי סדום על ידי מים רוח ואש כוחות אלו שיוצאים גם מפיו של האדם בהם הוא יענש אם הוא לא ישתמש בהם בצורה הנכונה.

א"כ נלך צעד נוסף, שנאמר על הסוכה (ישעיהו פרק ד),

*"וְסִפָּה תִּהְיֶה לְצֵל יוֹמָם מִחֹרֵב וּלְמַחְסָה וּלְמִסְתָּוֶה מִזֶּרֶם וּמִמְטָר."*

מה כוונת הפסוק, הרי האמת היא שאם נושבת רוח אז הסוכה נופלת, משום שהיא יותר מדי חלשה לעמוד מול רוחות. וגם כשירד גשם אז אנו יוצאים מהסוכה, ושחם בחוץ אז קשה לנו לשבת בסוכה, אז מה מתכוון הפסוק באומרו, "וסכה תהיה לצל יומם מחרב ולמחסה ולמסתור מזרם וממטר"?

אלא בספר "נחלת דוד" (חלק ב) מובא פירוש הגר"א לדבר, והגר"א אומר שמשמעות מצוות סוכה היא להכניע את יצר הרע של לשון הרע. והראיה לזה מהמילה "סוכה" שיש בה, "ארבע תיבות מארבעה מוצאות".

מה זאת אומרת ארבע תיבות מארבעה מוצאות? אלא כשאנו מדברים מסביר הגר"א יש אותיות שכדי לבטא אותם אנחנו צריכים להשתמש בשניים. ויש אותיות שאנו משתמשים בשפתיים, יש אותיות שצריך להשתמש בחיך, יש אותיות שצריך להשתמש בגרון ויש אותיות שצריך להשתמש בלשון.

הגר"א מסביר, שבמילה סוכה אנו משתמשים בשניים, בשפתיים, בחך, ובגרון. כי בשביל לבטא את האות "ס" אנו משתמשים בשניים, באות "ו" אנו מזיזים את השפתיים, באות "כ" אנו מזיזים את החך, ובאות "ה" אנו משתמשים בגרון. ויוצא שהחלק היחידי שאנו לא משתמשים בו זה הלשון. והגר"א מסביר שארבעה החלקים הללו (שניים, שפתיים, חך, גרון) מסובבים את הלשון ושומרים אותו מלשון הרע. וזה מה שנאמר בתהלים פרק לא, "תִּצְפְּנִם בְּסֶקֶה מְרִיב לְשׁוֹנוֹ".

כלומר שהסוכה מעוררת אותנו מלדבר לשון הרע ועל ידי כך הסוכה שומרת עלינו מהפורעניות הגדולות שיש בעולם. וזה כוונת הפסוק שהסוכה שומרת עלינו מ"חורב" כלומר חום, וזה הכח הנקרא אש. מ"זרם", שזה הכח הנקרא רוח, ו"מטר" הכח הנקרא מים. משום שאם נשתמש בכוח הדיבור שלנו בצורה החיובית זאת תהיה השמירה הגדולה עלינו מאש, רוח ומים. אומר השפת אמת על הגמרא במסכת שבת שאין העולם מתקיים אלא, "בהבל פיהם של תינוקות של בית רבן." פירוש הדבר, שהסיבה שכל העולם מתקיים היא בגלל הבל פיהם של התינוקות הקטנים שיושבים בבית רבן. כלומר שאותם תינוקות שמשחקים ומשתעשעים עם הם הסיבה שהעולם ממשיך להתקיים, מדוע זה כך, הרי הם לא גדולי הדור והם בקושי יודעים לברך? אלא כשהם מדברים דיבורם טהור כי הם נקיים מכל חטא ועוון, וזה הדיבור מקיים את העולם. אומר השפת אמת, שיש זמן שגם אנחנו זוכים להיות טהורים כמו תינוקות בית רבן וזה במוצאי יום הכיפורים.

הרי מאלול, ועד יו"כ אנחנו מקפידים לשמור על הדיבור שלנו בגלל אימת הדין, כי אנחנו פוחדים שאם נשתמש בדיבור שלנו בצורה לא נכונה נשפט ונענש על ידי מידת הדין. לכן במוצאי יו"כ אחרי שהתקבלו תפילתינו ותשובתינו לפני ה' יתברך אז דיבורנו גם הוא זוכה להיות טהור כמו, "הבל פיהם של תינוקות של בית רבן". ואיך אנחנו שומרים על טהרה זו? על ידי שאנו נכנסים לסוכה; משום שהסוכה שומרת על דיבורינו שישמר טהור. לכן המשנה ברורה (סימן תרלט ס"ק ב) אומר שצריך להזהר בדיבור בסוכה וכך לשונו, "ולפי שקדושת הסוכה גדולה מאוד ראוי למעט בה בדברי חול ולדבר בה כי אם קדושה ותורה, וכל שכן שיהיה זהיר מלדבר שם לשון הרע ורכילות ושאר דיבורים האסורים".

ומענין, שכאשר הקב"ה מצווה את נח לבנות תיבה הקב"ה אומר לו (בראשית ו טו), "וזה אשר תעשה אותה שלש מאות אמה אורך התבה חמישים אמה רחבה ושלשים אמה קומתה". ומידות אלו שבתורה בגימטריה יוצרים את המילה לשון (ל=30 ש=300 נ=50) כלומר שהקב"ה רוצה שנח יבנה תיבה שתשמור על לשונו ושידע להשתמש בלשונו בצורה נכונה. ולכן כמה נפלא שהמילה הנרדפת למילה "מילה" היא "תיבה". שעל ידי דיבור נכון אנו יוצרים תיבה, ותיבה זו שומרת עלינו מכל צרה, מחלה ופגע רע. כי שימוש נכון בכח הדיבור מונע מהמים האש ורוח לפגוע בנו, וזו היא מעלתה של הסוכה השומרת על לשונו שישמר טהור ובהבל פיני נקיים את העולם ואת עצמינו כתינוקות של בית רבן הטהורים והנקיים.

גדולי עולם שהיו נפרדים מהסוכה בהושענא רבה הם היו מניחים את ראשם על דפנות הסוכה לזמן רב, וכאשר הם היו מרימים את ראשם היה המקום רטוב מדמעות. והסיבה לכך היא משום שכשעוזבים את הסוכה צריך להתחנן שהקב"ה ייתן לנו את השמירה המיוחדת של הסוכה לכל השנה. וכמה שנרצה בשמירה של הסוכה כך נזכה בה משום ש"לא בשמיים היא ולא מעבר לים היא כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאוד בפיוך ובלבבך לעשותו" (דברים ל, יד). הדבר הזה נמצא "בפיוך", כלומר בפה של כולנו ששם נמצאים האש המים והרוח.

ופלאי פלאים, שבביהמ"ק אנו מוצאים גם כן את אש, מים ורוח. האש נמצאת על המזבח, "אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח לא תכבה," והיו מריחים את הקטורת עד יריחו וזה מסמל את הרוח שמעבירה את ריח הקטרת. והמים-בחג הסוכות שהיו מנסכים על גבי המזבח כנאמר על דוד (שמואל ב פרק כג),  
"**וַיִּשְׁאַבוּ מַיִם מִבְּאֵר בֵּית לָחֶם אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעַר וַיִּשְׂאוּ וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶל דָּוִד וְלֹא אָבָה לְשִׁתּוֹתָם וַיִּסַּךְ אֹתָם לֵה:**"  
וכותב הרד"ק שם, "אמרו כי הזמן הזה היה חג הסוכות שהיו מנסכים בו המים ובמה עשה דוד כי היתר במות היה אז ונסך מים אלו בבמה".

הצירוף הזה, של ניסוך המים בחג הסוכות-שמחת בית השואבה, אש על המזבח, רוח ריח הקטרת שאנו נראה בבית מקדשינו, שיבנה בב"א, נמצא גם בתוך הסוכה של כל אחד מאיתנו. אם נכנס לסוכה עם הידיעה העצומה הזאת, אז אותו הבל פינו הטהור שאנו זוכים במוצאי יום הכיפורים, וששומע את הבת קול אומרת, "לך אכל בשמחה לחמך", יישמר בנו על ידי הסוכה. ונזכה ונראה להקמת סוכת דוד הנופלת, ול"וראו כל בשר יחדו כי פי ה' דבר".

# Shmini Azteres: A Nuanced and Contemplative Time<sup>2</sup>

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## Introduction

Shmini Azteres is perhaps the most complex and confusing holiday of the year on the Jewish calendar. What is the nature of the day? Are we supposed to view Shmini Azteres as the last day of Sukkos, or as a separate holiday with its own theme, juxtaposed immediately after another holiday?

Every holiday has a symbol or action associated with it. On Pesach we have the matza, on Shavuos we stay up all night learning Torah and have the custom to eat dairy, on Rosh Hashana we blow the shofar, and of course Sukkos has the sukkah and *arba minim* – but what action or symbol do we associate with Shmini Azteres?

A usual place to investigate the essence of a holiday is to examine the text of the liturgy. However, even Chazal seem to have difficulty defining the day – is it “שמיני חג העצרת”, “שמיני עצרת”, or “שמיני עצרת ההג” – again accenting the confusion over designating the precise theme of the day<sup>3</sup>.

Another good place to begin understanding what a holiday is all about is the Torah reading on that day. However, even this simple exercise is shrouded with uncertainty. When one reads the entire Torah reading<sup>4</sup> backwards and forwards something peculiar appears, or perhaps does not

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<sup>2</sup> Many of the ideas presented hereto should be attributed to *mori verabi* Rabbi Michael Rosensweig Shlita, some of which were presented during the course of his daily shiurim on *Maseches Sukka* in 1997-1998.

<sup>3</sup> For some additional conflicting sources related to Shmini Atzeres, see Talmud *Arachin* (10a) – “שמונת ימי החג” which indicates a continuum of one single yom tov. By contrast, we say *Tefillas Geshem* (the prayer for rain) on Shmini Azteres, which presumably is not a blessing during the days in which we sit in the sukkah. Also, there is a debate between the *Shaarei Teshuva* and the *Chachmas Shlomo* (glosses to Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 668) regarding someone who inserted “חג הסוכות” during Shmone Esrei of Shmini Azteres and whether there is a need to repeat it or not. According to the *Chachmas Shlomo*, there is no need to repeat and he cites the following fascinating proof – “נ”ל כעת ראיה דיצא מן התורה דבפרשת ראה מונה כל הרגלים וזכר חג הסוכות תעשה לך ולמה לא זכר שמיני עשרת – “נ”ל כעת ראיה דיצא מן התורה דבפרשת ראה מונה כל הרגלים וזכר חג הסוכות תעשה לך ולמה לא זכר שמיני עשרת – that the Torah itself seems to incorporate the holiday of Shimini Azteres within Sukkos. See also *Harirei Kedem* (1:169) for an explanation of this debate.

<sup>4</sup> Devarim 14:22 – 16:17.

appear – there is no mention of the holiday of Shmini Azteres! Why didn't Chazal choose the Torah reading from either *Parshas Emor* or *Pinchas* in which the holiday is indeed mentioned? Furthermore, the usual practice on the second day of Yom Tov is to begin the selection in *Parshas Reeh* from “כל הבכור” when the holiday falls out on a weekday, yet we read the portion from עשר תעשר which deals with *tzedakkah* (charity) and canceling loans during the *shmittah* year. What is the connection between this Torah reading and Shmini Azteres?

There is one final question that must be answered. Although the institution of Simchat Torah came thousands of years after the Jews traveled in the desert, it still requires an explanation as to why the Geonim chose to append it to Shmini Azteres. What is the possible connection between these two seemingly distinct holidays and celebrations?

## The Nature of the Day

The Talmud teaches that Shmini Azteres is a separate holiday and we therefore say the bracha of *Shehechyanu*:

*We have learned in a Beraisa in support to R. Nachman:  
The eighth day is a holy day by itself, has lots cast for itself,  
the benediction of time for itself, offerings for itself, a  
separate song for itself, and also a blessing for itself.*

**Talmud Bavli Sukka 47b-48a**

תניא כוותיה דרב נחמן: שמיני רגל בפני  
עצמו לענין פז"ר קש"ב: פייס בפני עצמו,  
זמן בפני עצמו, רגל בפני עצמו, קרבן בפני  
עצמו, שירה בפני עצמו, ברכה בפני עצמו  
מסכת סוכה דף מז: - דף מה.

An added complication that we, especially those of us in *galut* face, is that although Shmini Azteres is a separate holiday, it is also still considered somewhat of a *yom tov sheini* (second day observed in the Diaspora) for the last day of Sukkos. This too is quite unusual since the last day of Sukkos is *chol hamoed* and not a typical *yom tov*!! The endless number of customs related to our orientation and use of the *sukkah* on Shmini Azteres also lends to our overall confusion about the holiday. It is also striking that unlike all other holidays, the Rambam does not have a section or chapter dedicated to the laws of Shmini Azteres.<sup>5</sup>

## Comparing to other Holidays

The annual holiday cycle commences with Pesach and ends with Shmini Atzeres. We begin, as our nation did, by celebrating our exodus from Egypt on Pesach and our receiving the Torah on Shavuot. This is followed by Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkos and finally Shmini Azteres. When we examine the month of Tishrei we encounter a mixture of emotions and themes.<sup>6</sup> The first half of the month are the *yemei hadin* filled with fear and trepidation. This is in stark contrast to the days of sukkos which the Rambam<sup>7</sup> describes as days filled with *simcha yeseira*, exceptional joy. These holidays represent the extremes in terms of our approach in *avodas Hashem* (service of G-d). We find both expressions in Sefer Tehillim.

<sup>5</sup> The *Shulchan Aruch*, however, does have two *simanim* (*Orach Chaim* 668-9) dedicated to the laws of Shmini Azteres.

<sup>6</sup> For a fuller presentation of this idea please see, Rabbi Michoel Rosensweig's shlita article in *Sukkos-To-Go* 5770.

<sup>7</sup> *Hilchos Lulav* 8:12.



Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with quaking.

**Psalms 2:11**

עֲבֹדוּ אֶת ה' בְּיִרְאָה וּגְיִילוֹ בְּרַעְדָּה:  
תהלים ב:יא

Serve the Lord with joy, come before Him with praise

**Psalms 100:2**

עֲבֹדוּ אֶת ה' בְּשִׂמְחָה בָּאוּ לְפָנָיו בְּרִנְנָה:  
תהלים ק:ב

In addition to the feelings that are accompanied with each of these holidays, we have many objects and actions that represent and symbolize the essence of the day. The solemn blowing of the *shofar* instills within us the seriousness of the day of judgment. On Sukkos we encounter the sight of joyfully waving the *arba minim* while chanting the *Hallel* or dancing at a *simchas beis hashoeiva*.

All of this can be contrasted with Shmini Azteres. Shmini Azteres is absent of any *maase mitzvos*, no physical object to attach meaning to, and no apparent salient theme or motif. So what are we celebrating on Shmini Azteres?

Let us return to the first time that the holiday is mentioned in the Torah and attempt to define the word *atzeres*.

[For] a seven day period, you shall bring a fire offering to the Lord. On the eighth day, it shall be a holy occasion for you, and you shall bring a fire offering to the Lord. It is a [day of] detention. You shall not perform any work of labor

**Vayikra 23:36**

שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תִּקְרְבוּ אֹשֶׁה לַה' בַּיּוֹם  
הַשְּׁמִינִי מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָּכֶם  
וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם אֹשֶׁה לַה' עֲצֵרֶת הוּא כֹּל  
מִלֵּאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ:  
וּיקרא כג:לו

Seven days you shall bring sacrifices before the Lord, the eighth day shall be a holy day for you and you shall bring a sacrifice before the Lord, **a gathering**, all work shall not be performed.

**Onkelos Vayikra 23:36**

שבעא יומין תקרבון קורבנא קדם יי  
ביומא תמינאה מערע קדיש יהי לכון  
ותקרבון קורבנא קדם יי כנישין תהון  
כל עבידת פולחן לא תעבדון:  
אונקלוס ויקרא כג:לו

Some explain *atzeres* to mean a **congregation**

**Ibn Ezra Vayikra 23:36**

עצרת היא י"א שטעמו קהלה.  
אבן עזרא ויקרא כג:לו

Targum Onkelos and the Ibn Ezra define *atzeres* as a day to “gather in”. But what are we gathering in? I would like to offer two approaches.

## Approach #1: Gathering a Unified Nation:

After spending seven days with our *arba minim* and performing the requisite *eged*, or binding of the species together, representative of the different facets of our people,<sup>8</sup> we bind ourselves together as one people with *Hashem*. Unlike the other holidays in which the *kedushat hayom* is focused on 'לה or קודש<sup>9</sup> the pasuk simply says “עצרת תהיה לכם”, it is a day of detention.”<sup>10</sup> As such, the theme of Shmini Azteres is *achdut*, and we therefore gather together an extra day for the simple purpose of spending an additional day together. We can now explain the protracted reading beginning with

<sup>8</sup> Midrash Raba Vayikra 30:12.

<sup>9</sup> Vayikra 23: 5,24,34,39 and Bamidbar 28:16, 26 and 29:1, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Bamidbar 29:35.

“עשר תעשר” even on a weekday, because the focus of these earlier *pesukim* are on the needy and less fortunate and our collective responsibility to care for them as our own:

*And the Levite because he has no portion or inheritance with you and the stranger, and the orphan, and the widow, who are in your cities, will come and eat and be satisfied; so that the Lord, your God, will bless you in all the work of your hand that you will do.*

**Devarim 14:29**

וְבָא הַלְוִי כִּי אֵין לוֹ חֵלֶק וְנַחֲלָה  
 עִמָּךְ וְהַגֵּר וְהַיְתוּם וְהָאֵלְמָנָה אֲשֶׁר  
 בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ וְאָכְלוּ וְשָׂבְעוּ לְמַעַן יְבָרְכֶךָ  
 ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדְךָ אֲשֶׁר  
 תַּעֲשֶׂה  
**דברים יד:כט**

This approach also clarifies the absence of *maase mitzvos* on Shmini Azteres. Since the essence of the holiday is to focus on our basic relationships with our fellow Jews and we do not need the excitement and fanfare provided by external objects or ceremonies. Therefore, even though the actual holiday of Shmini Azteres does not appear in this Torah portion, its main theme of unity and oneness are reflected both at the beginning and end. Our true expression of *simcha* is not when we dance with the *lulav* but when we rejoice with the convert, orphan and widow.

*You shall make yourself the Festival of Sukkoth for seven days, when you gather in [the produce] from your threshing floor and your vat. And you shall rejoice in your Festival-you, and your son, and your daughter, and your manservant, and your maidservant, and the Levite, and the stranger, and the orphan, and the widow, who are within your cities.*

**Devarim 16:13-14**

חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים  
 בְּאֶסְפֶּךָ מִגֵּרְנֶךָ וּמִיִּקְבֶּךָ: וְשִׂמַּחְתָּ  
 בְּחַגֶּךָ אַתָּה וּבְנֶךָ וּבִתֶּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ  
 וְאִמָּתְךָ וְהַלְוִי וְהַגֵּר וְהַיְתוּם  
 וְהָאֵלְמָנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ<sup>11</sup>:  
**דברים פרק טז פסוק יג- יד**

After a full month of Elul preparing for Rosh Hashana, and after enduring through the days of awe of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, and after rejoicing in the mitzvos of sukka and lulav, all of the previous barriers which may have separated us from our fellow Jews have come tumbling down. We have hopefully elevated ourselves spiritually above the mundane matters or pithy arguments. As such, Shmini Azteres is a day to rededicate ourselves to mending our interpersonal relationships with one another and taking a more inclusive approach to our community.

With this backdrop of our unity we can understand why it is precisely now after Sukkos that Hashem requests that we dedicate a holiday for the sole purpose of being secluded alone with Him.

*“I have detained you [to remain] with Me.” This is analogous to a king who invited his sons to feast with him for a certain number of days, and when the time came for them to leave, he said: “My sons! Please, stay with me just one more day, [for] it is difficult for me to*

עצרת הוא - עצרתי אתכם אצלי  
 כמלך שזימן את בניו לסעודה  
 לכך וכך ימים, כיון שהגיע זמן  
 להפטר אמר בני בבקשה מכם,  
 עכבו עמי עוד יום אחד, קשה

<sup>11</sup> The *Beis Yisrael* (as cited in *Kuntres Beinyanei ChagHasukkos Vesimchas Torah* p.76) also explains the special reading of the Torah that we have on Simchas Torah and its connection to the theme of unity. One of the *pesukim* that we read is *יהיה בישורון מלך בהתאסף ראשי עם יחד שבטי ישראל*, and there was a king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel together." One can homiletically break up the *passuk* as follows: *יחד שבטי* – refers to Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, *עם* – refers to Sukkos, and finally *ישראל* – refers to Shmini Azteres.

part with you!"

**Rashi Vayikra 23:36**

עלי פרידתכם.<sup>12</sup>  
רש"י ויקרא כג:לו

As a nation, we are summoned to “stay another day” in the presence of the *Shechinah*. After completing a more universal approach through our prayers on Rosh Hashana and our many sacrificial offerings on Sukkos, we are now ready to focus on our unique relationship with Hashem. On Shmini Azteres we offer a single *korban*!<sup>13</sup> This again underscores a sense of unity and closeness with Hashem as His nation. This is the “קהלה” of the Ibn Ezra and the “כנישין” of Onkelos. Only after solidifying our relationships with one another does Hashem require us to stay an extra day alone with him.<sup>14</sup>

We can now piece together our understanding of Shmini Azteres to the celebration of Simchas Torah. The Torah is the conduit for our unity. Our feeble conception of Hashem can only be understood through the prism of the Torah.<sup>15</sup> The Zohar teaches us “קוב”ה אורייתא וישראל חד”הוה”, Hashem, His Torah, and the Jewish people are one. Only when we as a nation exemplify *achdus* are we worthy to accept the Torah and have a relationship with Hashem. The *Orach Chaim Hakadosh*<sup>16</sup> views our unity as a prerequisite for our receiving the Torah, as the *passuk* says “ויחן שם ישראל כנגד ההר” and Rashi explains the reason why the Torah describes the Jewish people’s encampment in the singular form is to express that they encamped “כאיש אחד בלב אחד”.

However, it should be noted, that our connection with the Torah is not only communal but also on the individual level as well. All of the vessels fashioned for the Mishkan are listed as being fashioned by individuals except for the Aron which housed the Luchos for which the Torah says<sup>17</sup> “ועשו ארון עצי שיטים” and they make the Aron out of Shitim wood.” The Medrash expounds the following on this change from singular to plural:

*Why is it that all by all the other vessels is it written “and you*

*מפני מה בכל הכלים האלה כתיב*

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<sup>12</sup> The *Imrei Emes* is quoted as making the following sharp comment to show the hidden meaning behind this concept of “קשה עלי פרידתכם.” He says that not only is Hashem upset about the fact that it is time for everyone to return home after all of the holidays, so that “*pereida*” means that we are separating ourselves from Him, but also that Hashem is telling us that “it is hard for Me when there is a separation between the Jewish people themselves and that we do not get along with each other.”

<sup>13</sup> Bamidbar 29:36.

<sup>14</sup> But how does spending another day help relieve the feeling of עלי פרידתכם? Perhaps we can picture in our minds a parent sending off a child to study in Israel for a year. Sure, they spent many hours together the week before and hugged at home, but our instincts tell us that before boarding the plane a parent desires one last hug, to “hold them over” until their return. Similarly, Rav Karlenstein (*Kuntres Beinyanei Chag Hasukkos Vesimchas Torah* p.70) notes that since the objective of Shmini Azteres is to internalize all the messages of the holidays from the entire year and “tie them with a *keshel shel kayma*,” that in of itself prepares us for our time away from the direct closeness to the *Shechinah* and *Beit Hamikdash*.

<sup>15</sup> See Ramchal in *Derech Hashem* (4:2). A somewhat similar idea is found in the commentary of the Seforno (Vayikra 23:36) where he defines the cessation of work on Shmini Azteres as a time for “אזהרת עמידה איזה זמן” במקומות הקדש לעבד במקומות ההם את האל יתברך בתורה או בתפילה או בעבודה... שיעצרו במקומות הקדש ותהיה שמחתו שמחה של תורה ומעשים טובים.”

<sup>16</sup> Shemos 19:2.

<sup>17</sup> Shemos 25:10.

make” but by the ark it states “and they make”, Says R. Yehuda son of Shalom, so says G-d, “everyone should participate in the making of the ark in order for all to merit the Torah”

#### Midrash Shemot Rabba 34

ועשית ובארון כתיב ועשו ארון, א"ר  
יהודה ב"ר שלום א"ל הקב"ה יבאו  
הכל ויעסקו בארון כדי שיזכו כולם  
לתורה  
שמות רבה (וילנא) פרשה לד

On Simchas Torah we all get a chance to dance with the Torah, we all get an *aliyah*, and we all are able to singularly and collectively express our connection to “ותן חלקינו בתורתך”, our unique portion in the Torah.<sup>1819</sup>

Both Shavuot and Shmini Atzeres incorporate the theme of *Kabbalas HaTorah*, albeit, on Shavuot we accepted the Torah under duress and accompanied with thunder and lighting, whereas on Shmini Atzeres, at the culmination of the festival punctuated with joy and happiness, we rededicate ourselves to the values of the Torah through *simcha*.

## Approach #2: A Time to Reflect:

Another approach to our “gathering” on Shmini Atzeres is found in the writings of Rav S. R. Hirsch.<sup>20</sup>

*“We accordingly think we are not wrong if we take azteres to designate a day which is not fixed to bring new lessons and new truths for us all to accept and assimilate, but which has the mission to keep us still before the Presence of God – with this the idea of עציירה ממלאכה would certainly apply – to strengthen and solidify the impressions and knowledge we have already gained, so that they remain with us permanently, and do not become lost in the hurly-burly of life... The purpose of azteres is accomplished by our realizing once again all that we have gained by the festival, and by the firm resolution not to allow ourselves to be robbed in the turmoil and struggle and work our lives of what we have won... Shmini Atzeres would come to tell us, once again to **summarize and gather to ourselves all the thoughts and messages and resolutions which the moadim of the whole year have brought to us** and to resolve to persevere and hold fast to them before God, To impress them so deeply in our hearts that they become an unassailable part*

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<sup>18</sup> Rabbi Hershel Schachter Shlita similarly explains “Shemini Atzeres does not come to commemorate any particular historical event, but rather to emphasize *bechiras Yisrael*, the uniqueness of *Am Yisrael*. From all the nations of the world, the Jews alone were chosen to be designated as “*bonim lamakom*”, as “*bni bechori Yisroel*”. The entire uniqueness of the Jewish people lies in the fact that the *malach* (angel) teaches every baby the entire Torah before he or she is born. The *simcha* of the completion of the entire Torah is not something separate from the *simcha* of the *yom tov*. The whole essence of the *yom tov* of *Shemini Atzeres* is interconnected with Torah study. Only through Torah study did we become the *Am Hanivchar*, and hence our *minhag* of celebrating the *simcha* of completing the learning of the entire Torah not only does not compete with the *simcha* of the *yom tov* of *Shemini Atzeres*, it rather complements it and enhances it.” ([http://torahweb.org/torah/2002/moadim/rsch\\_sukkos.html](http://torahweb.org/torah/2002/moadim/rsch_sukkos.html))

<sup>19</sup> The Midrash Tanuchuma, Pinchas no. 15, takes this parallel a step further. The Torah refers to Shavuot as the holiday of “*azteres*”. The Midrash says that all things being equal, Shmini Atzeres should be celebrated 50 days after Sukkos, just as Shavuot is celebrated 50 days after Pesach if not for the fact that it would be difficult for the people to travel to Yerushalayim in the winter.

<sup>20</sup> Commentary on the Torah Vayikra 23:36.

*of ourselves which cannot become lost in the course of the ordinary run of our yearly life on which we are now entering.*"<sup>21</sup>

Shmini Azteres is the culmination of the holiday season. Therefore, all the lessons that we have gained, starting with Pesach and ending with Sukkos are to be contemplated and internalized during Shmini Azteres.<sup>22</sup> It is for this reason that the holiday is not accompanied with any mitzvah items that may detract or distract us from this process. Shmini Azteres is a time to reflect upon and somehow integrate into ourselves the sometimes opposite themes of *yirah vafachad*, fear and trepidation, associated with the *yemei hadin* and at the same time the *simcha yeseira* of Sukkos.<sup>23</sup> This final holiday, without the fanfare or excitement often generated by other festivals, with a Torah reading that does not even mention its name, charges us with the duty to incorporate all the ideas we have studied, sermons we have heard, and emotions we have felt, into our daily lives as we return to the "hurly-burly of life." The word for a stop sign in Hebrew is "aztor", because it engages us to stop before continuing on our way. Shmini Azteres is a time to stop and reflect and to uplift our mundane lives with the spirituality it deserves.

The best way to ensure that our lives will be infused with spirituality and meaning is through our dedication to Talmud Torah. For example, by studying the *Shulchan Aruch*, we become aware of the myriad laws that we encounter on a daily basis in our work place and with our dealings with others. Additionally, the ultimate expression of synthesis of the opposing themes of "yirah" and "simcha" is portrayed through our daily commitment to the study of Torah.

*The orders of the Lord are upright, causing the heart to rejoice;*

**Psalms 19:9**

פְּקוּדֵי ה' יִשְׁרִים מְשֻׁמְחֵי לֵב  
תְּהִלִּים פֶּרַק יֵט פִּסּוּק ט

On the one hand, we must approach the study of Torah with fear and trepidation, on the other hand, engaging in serious Torah study provides us the greatest enjoyment!<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps these are two themes that we should reflect upon while dancing with the Torah celebrating the culmination of the holiday cycle on Shmini Azteres and Simchat Torah.

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<sup>21</sup> See also Commentary on the Torah, Devarim 16:8 – "The seventh day brings us the task of now **gathering** together all the thoughts, feelings, and resolutions which the *yetziat Mitzrayim* days should have awakened afresh in us, a summing up before God which we are to take out with us into our daily active life as a "permanent" possession." Also see *Collected Writings of Rav S. R. Hirsch* Vol. 2 p. 154-9,181 for his explanation of the transition from the month of Tishrei which is filled with festivals to that of Cheshvan; the test of whether we were uplifted and inspired to change after experiencing Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, and Sukkos, is how we act when we return to our every day routine lives and schedules.

<sup>22</sup> See *Sefas Emes* (Sukkos p. 97) who cites the verse from the Torah of "והיית אך שמחה" and notices that the numerical value of "אך" is 21, which corresponds to the 21 days from Rosh Hashana through Shmini Azteres. As such, Shmini Azteres is the time to "take in" all the lessons learned during those 21 days. See also *Kuntres Beinyanei Chag Hasukkos Vesimchas Torah* p.7, where he cites from his father Rav Dovid Karelenstein that "אך" also correlates to the 21 days of Yom Tov in which we are obligated in the mitzvah of *simcha* (including Yom Tov Sheini: 2 days of Rosh Hashana, 9 days of Sukkos, 8 days of Pesach, 2 days of Shavuot) and therefore the joy which one should feel on Shmini Azteres should be inclusive and beyond all of these holidays.

<sup>23</sup> See Rambam *Pirush Hamishna Rosh Hashana* 4:7.

<sup>24</sup> See *Perush* of Rav Avraham Min Hahar *Nedarim* 48a and introduction to the *Eglei Tal*.

# Thematic Connections between Hakhel & Sukkot

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The penultimate mitzvah of the Torah [as counted by the author of the *Sefer HaChinuch*] is the ceremony of *Hakhel* (Deut. 31:10-13), the gathering of men, women and children once every seven years to hear the reading of selections from Sefer Devarim. Every seven years since 1945 the ancient ceremony has been symbolically reenacted and a reading commemorating the ancient practice is now held in the plaza of the Kotel on Chol haMoed Sukkot, most recently in 2008.

What do we know about *Hakhel* from the *pesukim* and the explanations of Chazal and the Rishonim? What is the significance of and reason for the mitzvah? When does it take place? How does the timing help to achieve its goal? Here are the *pesukim*:

*And Moshe commanded them, saying: at the end of seven years, in the appointed time of the year of release, during the holiday of Sukkot, when all of Israel comes to be seen at the presence of the Lord your God in the place in which He shall choose, you shall read this teaching before all of Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, the men and the women and the little ones and the stranger that is within your gates, that they may hear, and they may learn, and fear God, and observe to do all the words of this teaching. And that their children who have not known, may hear, and learn to fear God, all the days you live on the soil that you will be crossing the Jordan to possess.*

**Devarim 31:10-13**

וַיִּצְוּ מֹשֶׁה, אוֹתָם לֵאמֹר: מִקֵּץ שִׁבְעֵי שָׁנִים, בְּמוֹעֵד שְׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָּה--בְּחַג הַסּוּכּוֹת. בָּבוֹא כָל-יִשְׂרָאֵל, לְרֹאשׁוֹת אֶת-פְּנֵי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ, בְּמָקוֹם, אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר: תִּקְרָא אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת, נֹגֵד כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל--בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם. הִקְהֵל אֶת-הָעָם, הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהַנְּשִׂימוֹת וְהַגֵּרִי, אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֵיךָ--לְמַעַן יִשְׁמְעוּ וְלְמַעַן יִלְמְדוּ, וְיִרְאוּ אֶת-ה' אֱלֹקֶיכֶם, וְשָׁמְרוּ לְעֲשׂוֹת, אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת. וּבְנִיחָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדְעוּ, יִשְׁמְעוּ וְלִמְדוּ--לְיִרְאָה, אֶת-ה' אֱלֹקֶיכֶם: כָּל-הַיָּמִים, אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם חַיִּים עַל-הָאָדָמָה. אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים אֶת-הַיַּרְדֵּן שָׁמָּה, לְרִשְׁתָּהּ.  
דברים לא:י – יג

When does *Hakhel* take place? The *pasuk* gives some parameters- במועד שנת, מקץ שבע שנים- בחג הסוכות, השמיטה. The phrase *מקץ שבע שנים* is notoriously difficult to pin down in this context and is the subject of a well-known disagreement between the medieval commentators Ibn-Ezra and Ramban.<sup>25</sup> It is noteworthy that the identical phrase is used in Deut. 15:1 where the mitzvah of *shemittah* (the Sabbatical year) is described.

<sup>25</sup> Ibn Ezra insists that the word "*miketz*" here and in Deut. 15:1 and 9:11 is susceptible to variant meanings. He reads these three instances of *miketz* in Sefer Devarim to refer to the beginning, not the end of the time frame being considered. Thus God handed Moses the Tablets of the Law at the beginning of the 40<sup>th</sup> day, not at the end of that

At the end of seven years you shall make a release... And this is the matter of the release- every creditor shall release that which he has lent to his neighbor; he shall not exact the repayment of his neighbor and his brother because a release to the Lord has been proclaimed.

**Devarim 15:1-2**

מקץ שבע-שנים, תעשה שמטה וזה, דבר השמטה—שמוט כל-בעל משה ידו, אשר ישה פריעהו: לא-גש את-רעהו ואת-אחיו, כי-קרא שמטה לה'.  
**דברים טו, א-ב**

The Rambam in his code, summarizing the view of the Sages, sees both 15:1 and 31:10 as referring to the end of the seventh year continuing into the eighth year (or the first year of the new cycle). The phrase מקץ שבע שנים in Deut 15:1 is a reference not to the laws forbidding working the land and harvesting its produce - those are the subject of the laws of *shemittah* found in Lev. 25: 1-7, where the word “*miketz*” is not used. Rather, Deut. 15 is focused on *shemittat kesafim*, the cancellation of loans, which is effective only at the end of the seventh year. Similarly the phrase מקץ שבע שנים used in connection with *Hakhel* refers to a date following the end of the seventh year, in the first weeks of the eighth year:

Loans are not nullified until the conclusion of the Sabbatical year. This is derived from the pasuk (Devarim 15:1-2) which reads, “[a]t the end of seven years, you shall effect a remission. This is the matter of the remission.” And in Devarim 31:10 we read “At the end of seven years, in the appointed time of the year of release, during the holiday of Sukkot.” Just as in that instance [i.e. Hakhel] [the event takes place] after the seven [years], so too, the nullification of the debts takes place after the [seven years].

**Rambam Hilchot Shemita V'Yovel 9:4**

אין שמיטת כספים אלא בסופה שנאמר מקץ שבע שנים תעשה שמטה וזה דבר השמיטה ושם הוא אומר מקץ שבע שנים במועד שנת השמיטה בחג הסוכות. מה שם אחר שבע אף השמטת כספים אחר שבע. לפיכך הלוח את חבירו בשביעית עצמה גובה חובו כל השנה וכשתשקע חמה בלילי ראש השנה של מוצאי שביעית אבד החוב. רמב"ם הלכות שמיטה ויובל ט:ד

The timing of *Hakhel*, which Chazal took as a given, teaches us, through use of the word “*miketz*” in both contexts, that nullification of debts takes place only at the end of the seventh year. But how do we know what the Torah meant in using the word “מקץ” with respect to *Hakhel*? Why should *Hakhel* take place specifically at the end of the seventh year? And if *Hakhel* is to take place during the holiday of Sukkot, how can the phrase שנת השמיטה be used? Does not Rosh HaShanah mark the end of the *shemittah* year?

day, and *shemittah* kicks in at the beginning of the seventh year, not at its end. Similarly, the *Hakhel* ceremony was held, in his view, at the beginning of the seventh year (i.e., Sukkot of year seven, not the Sukkot of the year following *shemittah* which is the traditional approach.) Those who disagree with Ibn Ezra need to parry the ostensible proof from 15:1 which, assuming that it refers to the agricultural laws of the Sabbatical year, apply throughout the year, not only at its end.

Chazal (*Sifrei* Devarim section 111) take rather a different view. Starting with the principle that *Hakhel* takes place following the conclusion of the *shemittah* year, they read the *pesukim* beginning with Deut. 15:1 to refer to the extinguishing of financial debt (*shemittat kesafim*), rather than the prohibitions relating to working the field and gathering the harvest. (See Rambam’s summary in the text). Ramban, though, challenges the Ibn Ezra on the latter’s own ground and insists that *miketz* in Deut. 31:10 refers to the period following the Sabbatical year, even as the same word as used in Deut. 15:1 refers to the beginning (or does he mean the entirety?) of the seventh year.

The Netziv offers a rationale for why the term מועד שנת השמיטה is used and why Chazal understood the phrase to refer to Sukkot, particularly Sukkot of the eighth year:

*“At the appointed time of the year of release” – [The Torah] refers to the eighth year as the Shemittah year [even though it is the seventh year in which work in the field is forbidden] because the reality of the prohibitions are more apparent during Chol haMoed Sukkot of the eighth year, when one feels the absence of the harvest season, than during Sukkot of the seventh year when the granaries are full.*

**Netzi’v, Ha’Emek Davar Devarim 31:10**

- במועד שנת השמיטה, קרא שנת השמינית שנת השמיטה, משום שיותר ניכר שביתת הארץ בחול המועד סוכות של שמינית שלא היה קציר ואסיף לפניו מחול המועד סוכות של שנת שביעית עצמו שהגרנות מלאים בר.  
**הנצי"ב בהעמק דבר דברים לא:י**

Along the same lines, the Talmud notes that produce grown during the end of the seventh year and harvested during the eighth has the prohibitions of *shemittah* year produce.

*R. Assi said in the name of R. Yochanan, and the same was said in the name of R. Yose of Galilee: it is written [Devarim 31:10] “At the end of seven years, in the appointed time of the year of release, during the Feast of Tabernacles.” What has the year of release to do with Tabernacles; it is already the eighth year [because the pasuk says at the end of every seven years?]. It is only to tell us that all grain which was one-third ripe before Rosh HaShanah [of the eighth year] must be regarded even in the eighth year as the product of the Shemittah year...*

**Rosh HaShanah 12b**

אמר רב אסי א"ר יוחנן ומטו בה משמיה דרבי יוסי הגלילי אמר קרא [דברים לא:י] מקץ שבע שנים במועד שנת השמיטה בחג הסוכות שנת השמיטה מאי עבדתיה בחג הסוכות שמינית היא אלא לומר לך כל תבואה שהביאה שליש בשביעית לפני ראש השנה אתה נוהג בו מנהג שביעית בשמינית...  
**תלמוד בבלי ראש השנה יב:**

Thus, the מועד שנת השמיטה does not occur during the actual year of *shemittah* [the seventh year] but rather during the early days of the eighth year when the effects of *shemittah* are actually being felt.

Why is it so important to conduct the ceremony of *Hakhel* at this juncture- at the culmination of the seventh/*shemittah* year, during the holiday of Sukkot? Several Acharonim offer different perspectives on what has been gained during the year of *shemittah* and how these gains ultimately contribute to the overall objective of *Hakhel*.

The Malbim (1809-1879) focuses on the holiness theme of the *shemittah* experience. Since we are prohibited from working the land, we have more time to devote to learning Torah. The spiritual growth experienced during the *shemittah* year, coupled with that experienced during the month of Tishrei (with Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur and the preparations for Sukkot) enable the Jewish people to reach for a closer relationship with the Almighty.

*This is the most beneficial time for the [reading of the “Torah” – Sefer Devarim, in fact] to take place, because during the shemittah year when the land was holy and undergoing a Sabbatical year, Bnai Yisrael were not working the land and were occupied with learning Torah. Now while it is true that the*

**במועד שנת השמיטה בחג הסוכות- העת המכושרת שתפעל בהם השמיעה, מפני ששנת השמיטה היתה שבת הארץ לה', והארץ היה גם כן קודש, וגם לא התעסקו כל השנה בעבודת-האדמה**



*shemittah year concluded [some weeks before Sukkot], the Jews were busy with Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur and then with building their sukkot and acquiring a lulav and etrog. Rather, Hakhel is celebrated, "as all of Israel came to revel in the presence of God" - and God who knows the inner working of every person's hearts knows that each one is preparing his heart for God.*

**Malbim Devarim 31:12**

ועסקו בתורה. ואף שכלתה  
השמיטה בראש השנה, אבל היה  
ראש השנה ויום הכיפורים ועסקו  
בסוכה וד' מינים: "בבוא כל  
ישראל לראות את פני ה'" - וה'  
בוהן-לבות, וכל אחד מקשט לבבו  
נוכה ה'.  
**מלבי"ם על ספר דברים לא:י**

Rav David Tzvi Hoffman (1843-1921) expressed a different perspective. Emphasizing the lack of produce that has been harvested during the previous year, he explains that we gather together at *Hakhel*, at the conclusion of the *shemittah* year, to thank God for sustaining us even during a year in which there were no normal economic activities and to show that we are willing to dedicate our lives to God regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

*And now, with the conclusion of the shemittah year, a year in which there was total abstention from working the land, in which they honor God by not planting and by not harvesting, Bnai Yisrael - men, women and children - are commanded to appear before God, to praise Him for providing their sustenance even during a year when the land is not planted or harvested, and so that they can accept upon themselves the Torah as they accepted it in the desert, and to promise, in this way, that they are willing to dedicate their lives to the service of God in all times and in all situations.*

**Rav David Tzvi Hoffman on Devarim 31:10**

ועכשיו עם גמר שנת השמיטה, ששבתו  
שנה שלימה מעבודת קרקע לכבודו של  
ה', ולא זרעו ולא קצרו, נתחייבו כל  
ישראל אנשים נשים וטף לבוא לפני  
השי"ת, להודות לו שנתן להם פרנסתם  
אף בשנה זאת אשר אין בה חריש  
וקציר, לקבל עליהם שוב את התורה  
כמו שקבלו אז במדבר, ולהבטיח בזה,  
שהם מוכנים להקדיש את חייהם  
לעבודתו ית"ש בכל זמן ובכל מצב.  
**רב דוד צבי הופמן דברים לא:י**

The *Kli Yakar* (R. Ephraim Luntschitz, d. 1619) sees *teshuva* as the crucial goal for the ceremony of *Hakhel*. Rather than emphasize the religious growth fostered during the year of learning Torah, or the reliance on God that we must feel during the year we do not harvest, he looks at the social equality created as a result of a year in which no one earns more than any other. This leads to harmony generated by a lack of striving over property and profits. This is essential for the goal of *Hakhel* which is to achieve a communal sense of *teshuva*. [The *Kli Yakar* adds that this is why even the youngest children must be brought since ultimately if God will not forgive us for our sins, we ask Him to forgive us for the sakes of the youngest members of society who have not sinned.] Obviously his comments on equality are directed at an agricultural community whose wealthy members must give up their profits for the year - the explanation is less relevant for societies in which wealth is not directly tied to agriculture.

*The year of shemittah also leads to Hakhel and to societal harmony due to the fact that no one is harvesting and nothing is growing and the poor of the land eat alongside [and with equal rights to] the land owners since the latter are not allowed to harvest their land during this year, and without doubt there will be more peace between members of society since many arguments*

כי שנת השמיטה גורם גם כן ההקהל  
והשלום על ידי שלא יזרע ולא יצמיח  
בו ואכלו אביוני עמו כי אינו ראשי  
להחזיק בתבואת שנת השבע כבעל  
הבית, וזה בלי ספק סיבת השלום כי  
כל דברי ריבות נמשכין ממדת שלי  
שלי זה אומר כולה שלי וכל זה אינו

result in the attitude that what is mine is mine or the attitude that all is mine- and this is not so at all during shemittah... and even more so during the holiday of Sukkot when we all step outside our permanent homes to live in the temporary home of the sukkah. On the first day of Chol HaMoed the king is commanded to emphasize the value of peace, and that is the purpose of Hakhel since all the preparation is for the process of doing teshuva and that is why the king reads from the beginning of Devarim and the section dealing with tochechah and that is why all members of society are commanded to come... the children are brought to bring a reward to those who bring them. What is the reward? That we can appeal to God for mercy. And if God will not forgive our sins for our own sakes, He should forgive them on behalf of the young children who are still nursing from their mothers and have not sinned.

**Kli Yakar Devarim 31:12**

Having examined various reasons for the timing of Hakhel, let us turn our attention to reasons for some of the other details. Who performs the reading? One would expect that a ceremony taking place in the Bet HaMikdash would feature the Cohen Gadol [or perhaps even the head of the Sanhedrin.] In fact, the Abravanel notes that it was a common practice to read from the Torah during the holiday of Sukkot during the other years of the seven year cycle, and during those years the Cohen Gadol or a prophet or judge would indeed read from the Torah. At Hakhel, though, it is the king who must read.

*And I have already read, that every year it was either the Cohen Gadol or a prophet or judge or the greatest of the generation who would read a portion of the Torah on Sukkot. And he would complete reading from Sefer Bereishit, and Shemot, and Vayikra, and Bamidbar in six years. And on the seventh year, the year of Shemittah, the king would read from Sefer Devarim. And he would complete reading in this manner... and from here stems the modern custom on the eighth day, the holiday of Atzeret, which is also called Simchat Torah, that on this day we conclude the reading of the Torah. And an elder of the community stands and concludes the reading. And he reads by himself without the meturgeman [translator] to echo what the king would do in those days.*

**Abarbanel Devarim 31:14**

כל כך בשנת השביעית... וכן בחג הסוכות שכל אחד יוצא מדירת קבע לדירת עראי ויושב תחת סוכת שלומו הנה ביום א' של חול המועד נצטווה המלך לעשות רושם אל השלום, וזהו ענין ההקהל כי כל זה הכנה אל התשובה וקורא לפניהם מן אלה הדברים בדברים כבושים ותוכחות, וזה"ש אנשים ללמוד כו' טף למה באים ליתן שכר למביאים, כי בזמן שישראל עושים תשובה אז מבקשים תחנונים מלפניו יתברך על מחילת העון ויאמרו אם לא לענינו יעשה אזי יעשה בשביל גמולי חלב שלא פשעו **כלי יקר על דברים לא:יב**

וכבר ראיתי כתוב, שבכל שנה ושנה היה הכהן גדול או הנביא או שופט וגדול-הדור, קורא בחג הסוכות חלק מן התורה, ושהיה משלים ספר- בראשית, ואלה שמות ויקרא ובמדבר-סיני בשש שנים, ובשנה השביעית שנת-השמיטה בחג היה קורא המלך ספר אלה דברים... ובשנה ההיא השביעית היה המלך מסיים התורה באופן ההוא- ושמכאן נשאר המנהג שיום השמיני חג-עצרת אחרון נקרא יום שמחת-תורה, שבו ביום אנו משלימים את התורה, ועומד הגדול שבקהל ומסיים אותה, והוא בעצמו קורא בלי מתורגמן פרשת וזאת הברכה, לדמיון מעשה המלך בזמן ההוא.

**אברבנאל על ספר דברים לא:יז**

Still, why the king? The *pesukim* give us no clue.<sup>26</sup> Two different quotes by the Rambam help to place the reading by the king in context. The quote from *Hilchot Chagigah* reminds us that the king is the representative of the people but is also entrusted to deliver the words of God to the people.

*The king would read so that the people would hear... for the king is an agent assigned to broadcast the word of God.*

**Rambam Hilchot Chagigah 3:3-6**

והמלך הוא שיקרא באזניהם... שהמלך  
שליח הוא להשמיע דברי הא-ל.  
רמב"ם הלכות חגיגה ג:ג-ו

The second quote from the Rambam identifies the king “as the heart of the entire congregation”. Thus, when he reads and internalizes something, it is as if all have read and internalized the same thing.

*His heart is the heart of the entire congregation.*

**Rambam Hilchot Melachim 3:6**

שלו הוא לב כל קהל ישראל.  
רמב"ם הלכות מלכים ג:ו

Furthermore, it is precisely because we do not expect the king to be the one reading that he leads the ceremony. The element of something different contributes to the overall feeling of awe and respect. As the Malbim says, when the king reads, it makes an impression.

*The king, who has been chosen by God from amongst all the tribes of Israel, reads, and his words will make an impression on all of the listeners.*

**Malbim Devarim 31:12**

תקרא- גם הקורא הוא המלך שבו בחר ה' מכל  
שבטי ישראל, ודבריו יעשו רושם בלבות  
השומעים.  
מלבי"ם על ספר דברים לא:יא

Another reason may be simply to add to the *kevod HaTorah* by having the king read from the Torah.

*Even though [the Torah] says nothing about the king reading... and it appears to me that the king reads... as a form of according honor to the Torah.*

**Tiferet Yisrael Sotah 7:8 #52**

אע"ג שלא נזכר שיקרא המלך דווקא... ונ"ל  
דמה שהמלך קורא... כדי לתת כבוד לתורה...  
תפארת ישראל על משנה סוטה ז:ח אות נב

Having looked at the timing, and some of the relevant procedures, we now turn to the integral question- what is main objective of *Hakhel*? The *pasuk* in Devarim clearly tells us that

*... that they may hear, and they may learn, and fear God, and observe to do all the words of this law.*

**Devarim 31:12**

למען ישמעו ולמען ילמדו, ויראו את-ה' אלקיכם,  
ושמרו לעשות, את-כל-דברי התורה הזאת.  
דברים לא:יב

<sup>26</sup> Moshe speaks the mitzvah to the Cohanim and the elders (Deut. 31:9-10), but the verbs “read” and “gather” are given in the singular. See הרב אהרון גרו, מצוות הקהל בספר הקהל, עורך הרב יהודה זולדן, מכון התורה והארץ (citing a note in the *Encyclopedia Talmudit* [volume 10 page 444]) that the original mitzvah was directed at Yehoshua. Since *Hakhel* occurs שנת השמיטה, it can only occur once the mitzvah of *shemittah* occurs. The counting of the seven years to lead toward a *shemittah* year could only be started after the land of Israel was conquered and divided, some fourteen years after *Bnai Yisrael* crossed the Yarden under the leadership of Yehoshua. Yehoshua (like Moshe) had the status of a king, indicating that it was a king who should read from the Torah at *Hakhel*.

One way of achieving the requisite fear is by recalling the day on which we first received the Torah, when there was thunder and lightning, heavy cloud cover and the call of the shofar, all of which contributed to a tense atmosphere pregnant with hope and expectation but also fear and trembling.

This is the mindset the Rambam feels we should achieve, as he notes in *Hilchot Chagigah* 3:6,

*To listen with reverence and awe, rejoicing while trembling as on the day the Torah was given at Sinai.*

לשמוע באימה ובריאה וגילה ורעדה כיום שנתנה בו בסיני.

Why is it so crucial to reenact and to remember the experience of Sinai on a regular basis?

The *Sefer HaChinuch* looks at the communal aspect of the mitzvah. The attention that the gathering will attract will, in turn, shine light upon the Torah ultimately leading to greater knowledge of God.

*Among the reasons for this mitzvah: since the raison d'être of Bnai Yisrael is the Torah, and that is what distinguishes us from all other nations, and through it we merit eternal life... therefore it is fitting that we all congregate together, at one time, to listen from its words, and to have people ask, among the men, the women and the children "What is the reason that everyone is gathering together?" And the answer will be, "To hear the words of the Torah, which is the source of who we are and our glory." Through this all will come to praise the Torah and to speak of its value, and all will desire the Torah, and the nation will desire to learn the Torah to know God. Through this all will merit good, and be happy in the ways of God...*

#### **Sefer HaChinuch Mitzvah 612**

משרשי המצווה לפי שכל עיקרו של עם- ישראל היא התורה, ובה יפרדו מכל אומה ולשון, ולהיות זוכים לחיי עד... על כן בהיות כל עיקרן בה, ראוי שיקהלו הכל יחד, בזמן אחד מן הזמנים לשמוע דבריה, ולהיות הקול יוצא בתוך כל העם, אנשים ונשים וטף, לאמור: מה הקיבוץ הזה שנתקבצנו יחד כולנו? ותהיה התשובה: לשמוע דברי-תורה, שהיא כל עיקרנו והודנו והתפארתנו, ויבואו מתוך כל לספר בגודל-שבחה והוד-ערכה, ויכניסו הכל בלבם חשקה, ועם החשק בה ילמדו לדעת את השם יתברך, ויזכו לטובה, וישמח במעשיו...

#### **ספר החינוך מצווה תריב**

The Rambam sees a more integral reason for the gathering. The original revelation is the source of belief in Moshe and the Torah that he presented us on behalf of God. We need a constant reminder of this revelation to be constantly reminded of the power of Moshe's prophecy and the legitimacy of *Torat Moshe*.

*The Jews did not believe in Moshe, our teacher, [as the prophet of God] merely because of the wonders that he performed. What is the source of our belief in him? The revelation at Har Sinai. Our eyes saw, and not a stranger's. Our ears heard, and not another's. There was fire, thunder and lightning... How is it known that the [revelation] at Har Sinai alone is proof of the truth of Moshe's prophecy that leaves no shortcoming? As it says [Shemot 19:9] "Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people will hear Me speaking to you, [so that] they will believe in you forever." It appears that before this happened, they did not believe in him with a faith that would last forever,*

משה רבינו לא האמינו בו ישראל מפני האותות שעשה... ובמה האמינו בו במעמד הר סיני שעיינינו ראו ולא זר ואזנינו שמעו ולא אחר האש והקולות והלפידים... ומנין שמעמד הר סיני לבדו היא הראיה לנבאותו שהיא אמת... שנאמר הנה אנכי בא אליך בעב הענן בעבור ישמע העם בדברי עמך וגם כך יאמינו לעולם. מכלל שקודם דבר זה לא האמינו בו נאמנות שהיא עומדת לעולם אלא נאמנות שיש אחריה הרהור ומחשבה.

but rather with a faith that allowed for suspicions and doubts.

**Rambam Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 8:1**

רמב"ם הלכות יסודי התורה ח:א

It is interesting that the Rambam notes a requirement for all members of *Bnai Yisrael* to participate in *Hakhel*, even *talmidei Chakhamim*. We all need this reminder- no one is too important to exempt himself from the obligation.

*Even great Sages who know the entire Torah are obligated to listen with exceedingly great concentration*

**Rambam Hilchot Chagigah 3:6**

אפילו חכמים גדולים שיודעים את כל התורה כולה חייבין לשמוע בכוונה גדולה יתרה רמב"ם הלכות חגיגה ג:ו

The wording of the requirement to participate in the ceremony of *Hakhel*, that is found in *Hilchot Chagigah*, is very similar to the language that the Rambam used to describe another ceremony- the Pesach Seder. Both have an injunction to the Sages that they, too, must participate. Both require the involvement of women. Both are directed to include the children as well.

*Even great Sages are obligated to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt and those who elaborate at great length in telling of the events that occurred are to be praised.*

**Rambam Hilchot Chametz U'Matza 7:1**

אפילו חכמים גדולים חייבים לספר ביציאת מצרים וכל המאריך בדברים שאירעו ושהיו הרי זה משובח. רמב"ם הלכות חמץ ומצה ז:א

Why? In what other ways are the mitzvot of *Hakhel* and Pesach seder connected?

The final mitzvah enumerated in the *Sefer HaChinuch* is the requirement that each individual write a Sefer Torah. According to the *Sefer HaChinuch*, the aim of the mitzvah is to ensure that each Jew owns a copy of the Torah in order to learn from it. The mitzvah is about ensuring our continuity as a people centered around God, and living a life focused on His commandments.

*Among the reasons for this mitzvah, since it is known that people act based on their available resources, the Almighty commanded us that each member of Bnai Yisrael should have a Sefer Torah ready to read from constantly without a need to seek it in one's friends home.*

**Sefer HaChinuch Mitzvah 613**

משרשי המצווה, לפי שידוע בבני אדם שהם עושין כל דבריהם לפי ההכנה הנמצאת להם, ועל כן ציוונו ברוך הוא להיות לכל אחד ואחד מבני ישראל ספר תורה מוכן אצלו שיוכל לקרות בו תמיד ולא יצטרך ללכת אחריו לבית חברו. ספר המצוות מצוה תריג

The first mitzvah directed towards *Bnai Yisrael* as a group (שמות יב:ב החודש הזה לכם) is the command to establish a calendar. This requirement is first and foremost a sign of independence. As Nahum Sarna writes in *Exploring Exodus*, (pg. 81):

*A people newly freed must henceforth be sustained by its open native resources if it is to achieve true national independence, it is no longer to be a passive object of history, subservient to a dominant but alien culture. A liberated people must evolve and stress its own distinctive autonomous culture, devise its own structures for national existence, and forge its own institutions, one of its first desiderata is the establishment of a uniform calendar. Such an institution is a powerful instrument of societal, cultural and religious cohesion.*

Beyond the statement of independence, the establishment of the Jewish calendar, based as it is on the cycle of the moon, also provides an important religious and spiritual framework for who we are as a nation. As Rav Hirsch says (Shemot 12:1)

*The renewal of the moon serves as an example and as a model - that without a periodic desire for renewal, without return to God anew, and without continuously renewed reception of divine light and warmth, we would grow farther and farther from Him... Therefore, this commandment was set at the very establishment of our nation. The truth that this commandment teaches is a cornerstone of the Jewish heritage that separates us completely from the gentiles.*

This first group mitzvah thus sets the parameters of how our nation is to be established- that we must focus our attention on fulfilling God's mandates, that even if at times we drift away we will, like the moon, cycle back to our destiny.

If this first mitzvah helps to set the stage for what the Jewish people are to become, the last mitzvah provides a means for maintaining that identity. We may find a similar connection between the second mitzvah given to the Jewish people – the Pesach holiday - and *Hakhel* which as we have seen is second from the end.

The holiday of Pesach, the main thrust of the second mitzvah, is celebrated on the micro level, with families originally gathering to share the Korban Pesach, and today gathering to share in the Seder [שמות יב:ג שה לבית אבות שה לבית]. We celebrate in our homes thanking God for the freedom that He granted us by redeeming our ancestors from slavery. Sukkot is celebrated on the macro level. We leave our homes to take up residence in Sukkot as we proclaim to the world at large our dependence on God for our protection. Even the *korbanot* that are offered reflect a more universal attitude. Famously the seventy “*parei haChag*,” the seventy bulls sacrificed over the course of Sukkot are said to be “*keneged shiv'im umot (Sukkah 55b)*” thus exhibiting concern for all peoples of the world. At the same time, we never forget our own unique status and mission - on Shmini Atzeret there is just a single bull and the Gemara there comments, “*par yechidi lama? Keneged uma yechida*” (Why a single bull? To recall a singular nation).

Every year, as we move from Pesach to Sukkot, we transition from the micro to the macro, from the commemoration of the Exodus to the reenactment of our encampment in the desert in flimsy booths which God's protection rendered impregnable. And then, once every seven years, we introduce an additional element to Sukkot by reenacting the giving of the Torah and stressing that our existence as a people is tied to hearing the words of the Torah and incorporating its teachings into our lives.

Perhaps that explains why the language of the Rambam in describing participation in *Hakhel* and participation in the seder is so similar, and why everyone, the greatest scholars, the unlearned, even children are required to be present. We cannot fulfill our role in history without acknowledging that which set us apart from other nations. We cannot remain *Bnai Yisrael* without understanding the heritage of the ancient pre-Sinaitic covenants, the *Brit ben Habetarim* and *Brit Milah*. And we cannot keep our tradition fresh and vital without recalling the fear and hope, the light and the clouds and the voice of Hashem on that unique moment at Har Sinai.

# From Too Particular to Too Universal and Back Again

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The two major holidays that bookend the Jewish year are Pesach and Sukot. These weeklong festivals commence exactly half a year apart from one another and are in some ways polar opposites, while at the same time are inextricably linked in law and philosophy. This article will attempt to reflect on the fundamental philosophies that unite and divide these two celebrations. Chazal highlight this connection through the application of the “*gezeira shava Tu-Tu*,” the exegetical tool that enables the transposition of the laws of Sukot to Pesach and vice versa. We will see that this legal mechanism is responsible for many of the fundamental laws of the holidays and represents the spiritual and philosophical underpinnings as well.

The basic obligation to eat in a suka on the first night of Sukot is based on this connection:

*R. Yochanan said in the name of R. Shimon b. Yehotzadak, it says here (regarding Sukot) the fifteenth and it says regarding Pesach the fifteenth. Just as there is an obligation to eat matza on the first night of Pesach and the rest of the holiday it is optional, similarly we must eat bread in the suka on the first night of Sukot and the rest of the holiday it is optional.*

**Sukkah 27a**

אמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון  
בן יהוּצדק נאמר כאן חמשה עשר  
ונאמר חמשה עשר בהג המצות  
מה להלן לילה הראשון חובה  
מכאן ואילך רשות אף כאן לילה  
הראשון חובה מכאן ואילך רשות  
מסכת סוכה דף כז.

Much halachic literature has been devoted to the exploration of the precise parameters of this connection. Some *rishonim* insist that the amount of bread necessary to be eaten on the eve of Sukot is an olive’s volume, mirroring the volume of matza that must be consumed on the first of Pesach, while others require an egg’s volume, consistent with the general principles of the laws of suka.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ran in *Brachot* folio 12b (of the Rif) d.h. *Matnitin*.

Similarly, some say that rain exempts one from eating in the suka like the rest of Sukot,<sup>28</sup> while others derive an obligation to eat even in the rain based on the comparison to Pesach.<sup>29</sup> The *Pri Megadim*<sup>30</sup> goes so far as to say that one must eat “water-challah” (bread made of four and water alone) on the first night of Sukot similar to the matza of Pesach (despite the fact that it is chametz!)

The debates revolve around the ambiguity of exactly how similar these holidays are supposed to be and to what extent they maintain their unique individual identities. The same can be said of their philosophical identities. I would like to explore that relationship. How are these two holidays indeed polar opposites and what are their similarities and points of integration?

The prominence of these two holidays and their respective months is illustrated by this Tanaitic debate:

*The Beraita states: R. Eliezer said that the world was created in Tishrei, our forefathers were born in Tishrei and died in Tishrei ... The Jews were redeemed in Nisan and their future redemption will be in Tishrei. R. Yehoshua said that the world was created in Nisan, our forefathers were born in Nisan and died in Nisan ... The Jews were redeemed in Nisan and their future redemption will be in Nisan.*

**Rosh HaShana 10b-11a**

תניא רבי אליעזר אומר בתשרי נברא  
 העולם בתשרי נולדו אבות בתשרי  
 מתו אבות...בניסן נגאלו בתשרי  
 עתידין ליגאל. רבי יהושע אומר  
 בניסן נברא העולם בניסן נולדו אבות  
 בניסן מתו אבות...בניסן נגאלו בניסן  
 עתידין ליגאל  
**מסכת ראש השנה דף י'-יא.**

R. Eliezer believes that the creation of the world occurred in the month of Tishrei, while R. Yehoshua insists that it occurred in Nisan. It goes without saying that their debate is not rooted in the carbon dating of fossils to the closer half-year. It is also not a coincidence that they each believe that the births and deaths of the forefathers occurred in those same months, as well as the date of the future redemption. Clearly, R. Eliezer’s view is predicated on the perspective that Tishrei is the focal month of the year and is therefore most likely to be the time of the most historic events of all time, while R. Yehoshua sees Nisan as the month most apropos for these historic events. Their debate is a reflection on their differing perspectives on the relative importance of these months.

Nisan marks the birth of the Jewish People. This nation was forged through the shared experience of persecution and slavery and through the historic, miraculous redemption from Egypt. The entire month of Nisan is defined by this holiday at its center. Nisan marks the uniqueness of the Jewish People and the particular destiny that it possesses. In this sense, Nisan is the beginning of everything and is therefore designated as the first of the months, as God commanded in Egypt:

*This month should be to you the first of all months. It is the first for you for all of the months of the year.*

**Shemot 12:2**

הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לְכֶם רֵאשִׁית חֳדָשִׁים רֵאשֶׁון הוּא  
 לְכֶם לְחֹדֶשֶׁי הַשָּׁנָה:  
**שְׁמוֹת יב: ב**

<sup>28</sup> Tosfot in *Brachot* 49b and *Teshuvot HaRashba*, quoted by *Beit Yosef* in *O.C.* 639.

<sup>29</sup> Rosh in *Brachot* Chapt. 7 siman 23.

<sup>30</sup> *O.C.* 643. See Ran (end of Chapt. 2) of *Sukah* and *Tzalach* (*Pesachim* 108) who dispute this.



We are to calculate our time through the lunar months, beginning with Nisan. The Midrash, however, limits this designation and focuses on the seemingly superfluous, yet insignificant word “*lachem*”:

*“To you the first of all months” - “To you” and not to the nations of the world because the nations of the world count from Tishrei.*

**Pesikta Zutreta, Shemot ch. 12**

“לכם ראש חדשים” - “לכם” - ולא לאומות העולם, שהרי אומות העולם מונין מתשרי פסיקתא זוטרתא (לקח טוב) שמות פרק יב

The Midrash insists that even when other nations follow a lunar calendar, they begin their year with Tishrei. The importance of Nisan is limited to the particular interests of the Jews. With respect to the rest of the world, it is Tishrei that is most significant. Thus we can suggest that Rav Eliezer believes that with respect to the creation of the entire world, the event with the most universal significance, it is Tishrei that is most aptly suited to be its date. Rav Yehoshua, however, sees the world from the perspective of the Jewish People, and sees the unique mission of the Jewish People to be the purpose of creation and therefore dates the creation of world at Nisan. In a sense, perhaps Rav Yehoshua reflects the view of the Midrash, quoted by Rashi in the beginning of the Torah:

*“In the beginning, God created” - This verse demands interpretation, like the interpretation of our rabbis, [the world was created] for the purpose of the Torah which is called “the first path” and for the purpose of the Jewish People who are called “the first crop.”*

**Rashi, Bereishit 1:1**

בראשית ברא - אין המקרא הזה אומר אלא דרשני, כמו שדרשוהו רבותינו ז"ל בשביל התורה שנקראת (משלי ח כב) ראשית דרכו, ובשביל ישראל שנקראו (ירמיה ב ג) ראשית תבואתו.  
רש"י בראשית א:א

The identity of Tishrei is also manifest in the holidays that populate the month. It begins with Rosh HaShana and is centered around Sukot. Throughout Sukot we bring seventy cows in the *musaf* services. The *korban musaf* represents the essence of the *kedushat hayom*, sanctity of the day. In this case, Chazal say:

*R. Elazar said: These seventy cows, correspond to whom? They correspond to the seventy nations.*

**Suka 55b**

אמר רבי (אליעזר) [אלעזר] הני שבעים פרים כנגד מי? כנגד שבעים אומות.  
תלמוד בבלי מסכת סוכה דף נה:

The seventy *korbanot* represent the seventy nations of the world on whose behalf we pray and sacrifice on Sukot. The essence of Sukot is our universal concern for all of the peoples of the world.

This theme of Sukot is also represented by the essential symbol of the holiday: the sukah. The Midrash says that this mitzvah will have application to the non-Jewish community as well. The Midrash states that in the end of days God will give rewards to those who kept his Torah and the nations of the world will claim that they were never given the opportunity to keep the Torah. God will then give them one last chance – and He will choose the mitzvah of sukah for them to perform and test if they are able to sit in the Suka when it is very hot outside.

It is noteworthy that of all of the mitzvot to choose from, it is suka in particular that is chosen for this special test. Why suka? Perhaps this is a reflection of the universal nature of suka, and it is indeed the most relevant one to share with the general population. Additional support for the universal nature of Sukot can be found in the particular laws of the sukah. The halacha is most

stringent with respect to the materials that are valid for *schach* (the roof of the suka) in contrast to the walls, that can be made of anything. In addition, some of the walls can be imaginary, as we derive the requisite dimensions from the laws of eruv and construct our sukot from them. This may represent that fact that the suka focuses on that which unites us, that which is Above, and downplays the walls, the representation of that which divides us.

The essence of Rosh Hashana is that it is the Day of Judgment. The liturgy expresses this theme but is careful to express the universal nature of this judgment:

- *And so, place you fear, God our Lord on all of Your works and your dread on everything You created. All of the works will fear You and all who were created will bow to you. Everyone will create a single group to fulfill Your will whole heartedly.*
- *Our Lord and Lord of our fathers, rule over the entire world with Your honor and be elevated over the whole earth with Your glory. Reveal Yourself with your glorious strength over all inhabitants of the earth and let all that has been made know that You are the Maker and everything that has been fashioned that You were the one Who fashioned ...*
- *Regarding the nations, it is said on this day, which ones will go to war?*
- *This is the day of the creation of the world. On this day, all of the creations of the world will stand judgment.*

- בכן תן פחדך ה' א-לקינו על כל מעשיך, ואימתך על כל מה שבראת. ויראוך כל המעשים וישתחוו לפניך כל הברואים ויעשו כלם אגדה אחת, לעשות רצונך בלבב שלם...
- א-לקינו וא-לקי אבותינו, מלוך על כל העולם כלו בכבודך, והנשא על כל הארץ ביקרך, והופע בהדר גאון עזך, על כל יושבי תבל ארצך. וידע כל פעול כי אתה פעלתו, ויבין כל יצור כי אתה יצרתו....
- ועל המדינות בו יאמר איזו לחרב... היום הרת עולם היום יעמוד במשפט כל יצורי עולמים..

The belief that the entire world stands in judgment on this birthday of the world is perfectly consistent with the theme of Tishrei. The basic fact that Rosh HaShana is a day of judgment is based on a midrash quoted in the Talmud:

*On the first of Tishri it is the new year for years. What legal bearing has this? R. Nahman b. Isaac [explained the Mishnah to refer] to the Divine judgment 'as it is written, From the beginning of the year to the end of the year, [which means], From the beginning of the year sentence is passed as to what shall be at the end of it. How do we know that this takes place in Tishri? — Because it is written, Blow the horn at the new moon, at the covered time [keseh] for our feastday. Which is the feast on which the moon is covered over [mithkaseh]? You must say that this is New Year; and it is written [in this connection], For it is a statute for Israel, an ordinance for the God of Jacob ... Another [Baraita] taught: 'For it is a statute for Israel'; this tells me only that Israel [are judged]; how do I know that this applies also to the [other] nations of this world? Because it is written, an ordinance for the God of Jacob'. If that is the case, what is the point of saying, For it is a statute for Israel? — It teaches that Israel are brought up for trial first.*

**Rosh HaShana 8a-8b (adapted from Soncino Translation)**

באחד בתשרי ראש השנה לשנים למאי הלכתא ... רב נחמן בר יצחק אמר לדין דכתיב (דברים יא) "מראשית השנה ועד אחרית שנה" — מראשית השנה נידון מה יהא בסופה. ממאי דתשרי הוא? דכתיב (תהלים פא) "תקעו בחדש שופר בכסה ליום חגנו" איזהו חג שהחדש מתכסה בו הוא אומר זה ראש השנה, וכתיב (תהלים פא) "כי חק לישראל הוא משפט לאלהי יעקב" ... תניא איך כי חק לישראל הוא אין לי אלא לישראל לאומות העולם מנין תלמוד לומר משפט לאלהי יעקב אם כן מה תלמוד לומר כי חק לישראל מלמד שישראל נכנסין תחילה לדין מסכת ראש השנה דף ח-ח:

According to the Talmud, the verse in Psalms refers to Rosh HaShana by the name *kese leyom chagenu* – the “holiday during which the moon is not visible.” Rashi and Tosfot offer different possible interpretations of these words and the application to Rosh HaShana. According to Rashi, it relates to the astronomical view of the moon. Rosh HaShana always occurs on the first day of the lunar month Tishrei, when there is little or no view of the moon. Hence, Rosh HaShana is the (only) biblical holiday that occurs without the moon not-visible in the sky. Tosfot (d.h. *SheHaChodesh*) quotes Rav Meshulam who suggests that the normal *chatat* sacrifice that is brought on Rosh Chodesh is omitted on Rosh HaShana. This is based on the verses in Bamidbar (29:6) that enumerate the sacrifices of Rosh HaShana, and conclude that these sacrifices are offered, “aside from the *ola* of *Rosh Chodesh*” without any mention of the sin offering of *Rosh Chodesh*. Rabenu Tam disputes Rabenu Meshulam and insists that the usual sin offering of Rosh Chodesh is in fact brought on Rosh HaShana, but it is hidden in that it is not mentioned in the verse. In a similar vein, Tosfot offers another interpretation that Rosh HaShana is hidden in that its sacrifices are not mentioned in the Musaf prayers. The common denominator of all of these interpretations is that in some way a fundamental aspect of Rosh Chodesh is hidden on Rosh HaShana. Moreover, it is remarkable that Rosh HaShana is titled and defined by its relationship to Rosh Chodesh. The Psalmist chose to describe Rosh HaShana by the name *kese leyom chagenu*, and the liturgy consistently describe Rosh HaShana in this way throughout the prayers and Kiddush. Why is this holiday defined by this unusual and seemingly minor detail? Why not call it Yom HaDin or Rosh HaShana? In what way does *kese leyom chagenu* become an appropriate name, capturing the essence of the day?

Chazal perceive our lunar calendar to be an expression of the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the Jewish People. The Jewish People are identified by the moon and by our relationship to it, symbolized by Rosh Chodesh. The reason for this is not only because Jews count the months from Nisan, but also because most nations do not follow a lunar cycle at all:

*R. Levi said: The actions of the Jewish People are different than the rest of the world ... In their calendar, the nations of the world use a solar calendar and the Jewish People use a lunar calendar as it states “This month should be to you.”*

**Yalkut Shimoni no. 626**

א"ר לוי כל מעשיהם של ישראל מובדלים מאומות העולם... בבחשבונם שיהיו אומות העולם מונין לחמה וישראל ללבנה שנאמר "החדש הזה לכם" ילקוט שמעוני תורה רמז תרכו

Perhaps the name “*kese leyom chagenu*” indeed captures the essence of the day of Rosh HaShana in that it is the one holiday that occurs on the day that the moon is not visible; it is the one day when the uniqueness of the Jewish People is muted and the dominant concern transcends the unique needs of the Jewish People and relates to all mankind.

Thus the month of Tishrei, defined by Rosh HaShana and Sukot is of universal concern, in contrast to the particularly Jewish identity of Nisan. Nevertheless, Sukot concludes with an independent but related holiday of Shmini Atzeret. This day is defined by Chazal as:

*R. Elazar said: These seventy cows, correspond to whom? They correspond to the seventy nations. What about the individual cow [of Shmini Atzeret]? It corresponds to a single*

אמר רבי (אליעזר) [אלעזר] הני שבעים פרים כנגד מי כנגד שבעים אומות. פר יחידי למה כנגד אומה יחידה

nation. It is comparable to a human king who told his servants "make me a great meal." On the last day, he told his beloved "make me a small me so that I can benefit from your [company]."

#### Suka 55b

In our efforts to become universally relevant we must also be sure to maintain our unique identity. We therefore remain for one day, Shmini Atzeret, to focus on our unique relationship with God and to affirm our particular commitment to God's Torah. In a similar way, Yom Kippur follows Rosh Hashana in order to balance our focus on our own identity with our concern for all of mankind.

The themes that underlie these cornerstone holidays have parallels in the rabbinic holidays as well. Sukot is very similar to Chanukah, as evident in a number of sources:

*Ulla says, two Amora'im in the west (Eretz Yisrael) argue about this - R' Yossi Bar Avin and R' Yossi bar Zevida - one says that the reasoning of Beit Shammai corresponds to the days yet to come, while the reason of Beit Hillel corresponds to the days that are passing; the other says the reason of Beit Shammai corresponds to the bulls offered on Chag (Sukkot), while Beit Hillel's rationale follows the maxim: "One should always ascend with regard to kedusha and not descend."*

#### Shabbat 21b

According to one view of Beit Shamai, the seventy *korban musaf* offerings of Sukot, which define the essence of this universal holiday, are mirrored in the candles of the menorah. Even though we do not light the menorah according to the directions of Beit Shamai, the truth underlying this explanation may be undisputed.

In addition, the dominance of *pirsumei nisa* (publicizing the miracle) is indisputable. The Chanukah menorah is the only *mitzvah* whose function is to publicize something to the public. The menorah is lit in the door or in the window for all to see. Whether *pirsumei nisa* is fulfilled by communicating the story to the non-Jewish population is subject to a dispute amongst halachic deciders, but the simple reading of the Talmud with Rashi indicates that this *mitzva* is defined by the broader community:

*Alternatively, the requisite amount of oil is until the traffic stops in the marketplace. How long is this? Rabbah b. b. Chana said in the name of R. Yochanan: until the the Tarmodeans leave the market.*

#### Shabbat 21b

*Tarmodeans- The name of a nation whose people collected small twigs and they would remain in the marketplace until the people of the marketplace went home at night and would light flames in*

משל למלך בשר ודם שאמר לעבדיו  
עשו לי סעודה גדולה ליום אחרון אמר  
לאוהבו עשה לי סעודה קטנה כדי  
שאהנה ממך  
מסכת סוכה דף נה:

אמר עולא פליגי בה תרי אמוראי במערבא ר'  
יוסי בר אבין ור' יוסי בר זבידא חד אמר טעמא  
דב"ש כנגד ימים הנכנסין וטעמא דב"ה כנגד  
ימים היוצאין וחד אמר טעמא דב"ש כנגד פרי  
החג וטעמא דבית הלל דמעלין בקדש ואין  
מורדין אמר רבה בר בר חנה א"ר יוחנן שני  
זקנים היו בצידן אחד עשה כב"ש ואחד עשה  
כדברי ב"ה זה נותן טעם לדבריו כנגד פרי החג  
וזה נותן טעם לדבריו דמעלין בקדש ואין  
מורדין

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף כא:

ואי נמי לשיעורה עד שתכלה רגל מן  
השוק ועד כמה אמר רבה בר בר חנה  
אמר רבי יוחנן עד דכליא ריגלא  
דתרמודאי

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף כא:

רגלא דתרמודאי - שם אומה, מלקטי  
עצים דקים, ומתעכבין בשוק עד  
שהולכים בני השוק לבתיהם  
משחשכה ומבעירים בבתיהם אור,

their home. When the people needed more twigs, they would go out and buy from them (the Tarmodeans).

### Rashi, Shabbat 21b

וכשצריכין לעצים - יוצאים וקונין מהן.  
רש"י מסכת שבת דף כ"א עמוד ב

In addition, Sukot and Chanukah are the only two holidays that extend for eight days. They are the two times that *hadar* (beauty) is a dominant aspect of the mitzvah<sup>31</sup> and they are both mitzvot that must be done beneath twenty *amot*, in order for people to see the *schach* and the menorah. Moreover, the Rokeach<sup>32</sup> points out that Sukot is described in *Parshat Emor* immediately before the mitzvah of the menorah. Finally, the Book of the Maccabees (2) further highlights the connection between these two holidays by asserting that during the time of the Hasmonaim, they were unable to celebrate Sukot at the correct time and was in fact postponed until after the war, to be celebrated on Chanukah itself.

## Mikdash and Mishkan

Let us now turn our attention to our places of *kedusha*: the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and the Mikdash (Temple). There is a dispute among the *rishonim* regarding the purpose of the Mishkan. Rashi, Shmot 31:18, sees the Mishkan as a means of atoning for the Golden Calf. The implication is that if not for the sin of the Golden Calf, there would be no need for the Mishkan. In a similar vein, Rambam, *More Nevuchim* 3:46, writes that the *korbanot* were not an ideal, but a response to the pagan practices of the time. Ramban, Shmot 25:2, and Vayikra 1:9, writes that both the Mishkan and the *korbanot* are ideal commands that did not merely come as a response to some unfortunate event of the time.

Nevertheless, Rav Menachem Liebttag<sup>33</sup> suggests a very significant qualification. He argues that even if it is true that the Mishkan was not always “meant to be”, the Temple in Jerusalem was always part of God’s divine plan. This is evident from the fact that there has been talk of a *Beit Elokim* in that place since the time of the Avot (Bereishit 28:17). Similarly, the Jews sang of a *mikdash* in the Az Yashir (Shmot 15:17). Moreover, we are commanded in *Parshat Mishpatim* (23:14-17) to visit God three times a year and to be sure not to come empty handed. Clearly there was going to be a place of God in Israel even before the sin of the Golden Calf.

Why the discrepancy? Why is it that the Beit HaMikdash was always considered to be an ideal that we yearned for since the dawn of our history, while the Mishkan was introduced only as a reaction to sins? Weren’t these two structures spiritually one and the same? Indeed, according to the Ramban they were, but perhaps according to Rashi and Rambam they were not. What is the difference?

The Beit HaMikdash is described by the Navi as house of prayer for the entire world:

*Even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer; their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be acceptable upon Mine altar; for My house*

והביאותים אל הר קדשי ושמתים  
בבית תפילתי עולתיהם וזבחייהם לרצון  
על מזבחי כי ביתי בית תפלה יקרא לכל  
העמים:

<sup>31</sup> *Sfat Emet* on Chanukah 5840, fourth paragraph.

<sup>32</sup> Rokeach, Laws of Chanukah, 225

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.tanach.org/shmot/truma/trumas1.htm>

*shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.*

**Yeshayahu 56:7**

*For all peoples- and not just the Jewish People.*

**Rashi, Yeshayahu 56:7**

ישעיהו פרק נו פסוק ז  
לכל העמים - ולא לישראל לבדם:  
רש"י ישעיהו שם

Indeed, we know that sacrifices were offered in the Temple by foreign nations. The Temple of Jerusalem was known throughout the land, and all those who wanted to worship God in a Jewish fashion were welcome into this Temple to serve God. The Mishkan, however, was never to become a “house of prayer for all of the nations.” So long as the Jewish People were a nomadic tribe wandering the desert, the Tabernacle was not going to become an international house of prayer. Perhaps it was for this reason that although the Temple was always our ideal, the temporary Tabernacle was not, and was only constructed in order to provide a response to the sin of the *egel* and to ensure that it would not be repeated.

It is therefore most appropriate that the dedication of the Temple was actually on Sukot:

*And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto king Solomon at the feast, in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month.*

**Melachim I 8:2**

ויקהלו אל המלך שלמה כל איש  
ישראל בנרח האתנים בתג הוא החדש  
השביעי:  
מלכים א פרק ח פסוק ב

The “House of Prayer for all of the Nations” was dedicated on the “holiday of prayer for all of the nations.” However, the Tabernacle, that was to serve the unique needs of the Jewish People during their isolation in the desert, was dedicated in the month on Nisan:

*And it came to pass in the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was reared up.*

**Shmot 40:17**

ויהי בחדש הראשון בשנה השנית באחד  
לחדש הוקם המשכן:  
שמות פרק מז פסוק יז

The second Temple was dedicated before Pesach. However, once Jewish sovereignty was established during the times of the Hasmonaim, and the Temple was rededicated with a chance of re-establishing the type of Temple that the first one was, this dedication occurred on Chanukah, the holiday that is the “second Sukot.”

Judaism is a juggle of the universal mission and the particular; it is a religion that strives to spread its message throughout the world, but must constantly stay close to home in order to maintain its unique identity and commitment. This balance is symbolized by the Menorah – often considered to be the symbol of Judaism – that attempts to shine its light to the entire *reshut harabim*, the entire public domain, but must stay anchored within a handbreadth of the home.<sup>34</sup> In the same way, the major holidays of the year are divided, each focusing on one goal or the other, and the contrast of the Beit HaMikdash with the Mishkan reflects this tension as well. It is the mission of the Jew to live this tension and to best develop the opportunity to illuminate the world while warming one’s self and home at the same time.

<sup>34</sup> Talmud Bavli, *Shabbat* 22a.

# Succot: Celebrating our Dependence

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אנא הושיעה נא!  
Please, save us now!<sup>35</sup>

The tableau of a Jew waving the four species during Succot tells many stories: Different groups of Jews are united in prayer.<sup>36</sup> The human body's limbs and organs serve G-d together.<sup>37</sup> Foci of our joy are shaken in celebration.<sup>38</sup> The four domains of human influence are turned toward G-d.<sup>39</sup> Symbols of different Divine gifts are dedicated to G-d.<sup>40</sup>

One midrash, though, sees in our waving a particularly puzzling role: Atonement for the sin committed by Adam and Chavah when they ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. As cited by Rabbi Yonatan Eibeschutz, this midrash says:

'And you shall take for yourself on the first day  
[Vayikra 23:40]' – To atone for the first deed.<sup>41</sup> | ו'לקחתם לכם ביום הראשון' – לכפר על מעשה ראשון.

Explanations for the link between this mitzvah and the first human sin range from the mystical to the moral to the pilpulistic,<sup>42</sup> but one of the major themes of Succot might offer new insight into this opaque rabbinic linkage.

## Succot: Holiday of Dependence

All three of our regalim – Pesach, Shavuot and Succot – relate to G-d as Provider. On Pesach, we relive the ancient Divine miracles which created our nation; on Shavuot, we begin bringing the

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<sup>35</sup> Refrain from the special *hoshanot* prayers of Hoshana Rabbah, the seventh day of Succot

<sup>36</sup> *Menachot* 27a.

<sup>37</sup> *Vayikra Rabbah* 30:14.

<sup>38</sup> *Moreh haNevuchim* 3:43; *Sefer haChinuch*, Mitzvah 324.

<sup>39</sup> *Torat ha'Olah* 3:63.

<sup>40</sup> *Horeb*, Section 31.

<sup>41</sup> I have been unsuccessful in finding this midrash, although various works cite it as *Midrash Rabbah*, and one attributes it to Rashi. Rama's *Torat ha'Olah* (3:63) might present a link; Rama cites a passage from *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Emor* 30) which sees the 'first day' of Vayikra 23:40 as 'the first day of the calculation of sins', and he explains this to refer to the sin which took place on the first day of humanity's existence.

<sup>42</sup> For example, see *Nefesh Yehonatan* (R' Yonathan Eibeschutz) to *Parshat Emor*, *Maggid Mishneh* (R' Menasheh Klein) to *Parshat Emor*, and *Minchat Yisrael al haTorah v'haMoadim* (R' Yisrael Menachem Keehn).

first of our produce to the Beit haMikdash, thanking G-d for our bounty. On Succot, though, our prayer for rain uniquely expresses our on-going, total dependence upon G-d.

The urgent need expressed on Succot was highlighted by the prophet Zechariah. After depicting an apocalyptic war upon Jerusalem, accompanied by Divine revelation and punishment of the invaders, Zechariah predicted an annual international pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate Succot:<sup>43</sup>

*And all who remain from all of the nations who ascended against Jerusalem will ascend annually to bow to the King, the Lord of hosts, and to celebrate the holiday of Succot. And regarding any from the families of the land who do not ascend to Jerusalem to bow to the King, the Lord of hosts, the rain will not fall upon them.*

וְהָיָה כָּל הַנּוֹתֵר מִכָּל הַגּוֹיִם הַבָּאִים עַל יְרוּשָׁלַם וְעָלוּ מִדֵּי שָׁנָה בְּשָׁנָה לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לְמֶלֶךְ ד' צְבָקוֹת וְלַחֹג אֶת חַג הַסִּפּוֹת: וְהָיָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא יַעֲלֶה מֵאֶת מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאָרֶץ אֶל יְרוּשָׁלַם לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לְמֶלֶךְ ד' צְבָקוֹת וְלֹא עָלֵיהֶם יִהְיֶה הַגֶּשֶׁם:

This holiday is chosen for international tribute because it teaches human dependence upon Divine favor; those who participate in prayers for rain will be blessed with water for their crops, and those who do not will be denied this blessing.<sup>44</sup>

Zechariah's message is echoed in our libations of water in the Beit haMikdash on Succot, as explained by Rabbi Akiva:<sup>45</sup>

*Rabbi Akiva said: The Torah says, "Bring a measure of barley on Pesach" at the time of barley, so that the grain will be blessed. "Bring the first wheat on Shavuot" at the time of trees, so that the fruit of trees will be blessed. "Bring water libations on Succot" so that the rains will be blessed. "And regarding any from the families of the land who do not ascend to Jerusalem to bow to the King, the Lord of hosts, the rain will not fall upon them."*

אמ' ר' עקיבא אמרה תורה הבא עומר שעורין בפסח שהוא פרק שעורין כדי שתתברך עליך תבואה הביא בכורים חטים בעצרת שהו פרק אילן כדי שיתברכו עליך פירות אילן הביא ניסוך המים בחג כדי שיתברכו עליך מי גשמים ואו' והיה אשר לא יעלה מאת משפחות הארץ אל ירושלים להשתחוות למלך ד' צבקות ולא עליהם יהיה הגשם...

This theme of dependence also drives our annual departure from our homes to reside in the succah. Just as our ancestors relied upon Divine mercy in the wilderness, so we abandon our sturdy structures in favor of tenuous huts and trust in G-d.<sup>46</sup> And the same theme of trust in G-d is expressed in our mitzvah of waving the four species:<sup>47</sup>

*When do we mention rain in our prayers? R' Eliezer said: When we pick up the lulav. R' Yehoshua said: When we*

מאימתי מזכירין על הגשמים רבי אליעזר אומר משעת נטילת לולב רבי יהושע אומר

<sup>43</sup> Zechariah 14:16-17.

<sup>44</sup> This explanation is supported by the Tosefta *Succah* 3:18. For additional approaches to the selection of Succot, see *Avodah Zarah* 3a-b and Radak, Zechariah 14:16.

<sup>45</sup> Tosefta *Succah* 3:18

<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch sees in גוי, the name of a nation which rejects this dependence upon G-d, a relationship with גג, meaning roof, the opposite of the Succah. (Commentary to Bamidbar 29:13, and *Collected Writings* Vol. 2 Tishri V).

<sup>47</sup> Talmud, *Taanit* 2b.



*put down the lulav [at the end of Succot]. R' Eliezer explained: This is because these four species come only to gain favor for [the year's] water. Just as these four species cannot exist without water, so too the world cannot exist without water.*

משעת הנחתו אמר רבי אליעזר הואיל  
וארבעת מינין הללו אינן באין אלא לרצות  
על המים וכשם שארבע מינין הללו אי  
אפשר בהם בלא מים כך אי אפשר לעולם  
בלא מים.

Through its various rituals, Succot marks our dependence upon the Divine.<sup>48</sup>

## Adam and Chavah's pursuit of independence

When we wave the lulav, etrog, hadas and aravah to humbly recognize our reliance upon G-d, we atone for Adam and Chavah's act of eating from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

According to Rashi,<sup>49</sup> Adam and Chavah ate the fruit because they wished to create, in the manner of Divine creation; when the serpent pledged, "You will be like Elokim," he meant that just as G-d creates worlds, so too, they would create worlds.<sup>50</sup> Adam and Chavah did not wish to rely on the gifts of G-d.

More, a midrash<sup>51</sup> alleges that Adam and Chavah were drawn to the idea of emancipating themselves from Divine control. The original pair of human beings did not trust G-d, and they sought to eliminate the Divine last word over their fate. As explained by Rabbi Yehudah bar Simon, this was the serpent's seductive offer:

*Each entity created after another reigns over the other... and Adam was created last, in order to reign over all. Eat first, before He will create other worlds which will reign over you.*

כל שנברא אחר חבירו שליט בחבירו... ואדם  
נברא אחר הכל לשלוט בכל. קדמו ואכלו עד  
שלא יברא עולמות אחרים והן שולטין בכם.

As the *Eitz Yosef* commentary explains, Adam and Chavah planned to eat and become perfect, to such an extent that no subsequent Divine creation could equal them. Our original ancestors understood that their roles in the newly formed universe depended entirely upon Divine mercy, and they ate from the fruit in order to establish independence. On Succot, we reverse their decision by unabashedly acknowledging our reliance upon, and trust in, Hashem.

## The Benefit of Succot

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<sup>48</sup> One might suggest that Succot is a necessary precursor for Pesach and Shavuot. To borrow from the *Sh'ma Yisrael* formulation, Succot establishes that there is a G-d, Pesach establishes that G-d is ours ("My son, My firstborn is Israel") and Shavuot affirms that G-d is One ("You shall have no other gods before Me").

<sup>49</sup> Rashi to Bereishit 3:5, based on *Bereishit Rabbah* 19:4.

<sup>50</sup> Indeed, this may explain the measure-for-measure nature of their punishment: Adam became a creator in bringing life from the ground, and Chavah became a creator in nourishing life in her womb, but both of them were doomed to experience pain and frustration rather than the ease of Divine creation.

<sup>51</sup> *Bereishit Rabbah* 19:4.

Accepting dependence upon G-d has remained a challenge since the Garden of Eden, as evidenced in the construction of the Tower of Bavel,<sup>52</sup> and in the examples of monarchs throughout biblical history.<sup>53</sup> This is a normal human weakness; our self-respect is naturally tied to our ability to fend for ourselves. So long as we expect to rule our world, humility before any power will be humiliating. Even regarding our Creator we will find humility challenging, such that we may be moved to deny Divine benevolence in order to declare our independence.<sup>54</sup>

This lack of proper perspective on our position in the universe hampers our growth. G-d is not affected by our humility or our arrogance, but an unrealistic view of our place undermines our personal and religious development. The person who ties his self-image to a non-existent self-sufficiency blinds himself to his own flaws and needs, renders himself unable to trust, and cripples his relationship with G-d.

Pesach seeks to correct our blindness by reminding us of the historical events during which we were once dependent. Shavuot offers an opportunity for us to express our gratitude. But Succot, most of all, forces us to confront our reliance upon G-d by moving us into temporary shelter and commanding us to hold out our plants (the four species) before G-d while beseeching, "Please, save us now!" This is the humility which Zecharyah demands of the nations in a Messianic time and which the Torah demands of us on an annual basis, and in expressing it we correct that sin of Adam and Chavah.

For seven days, we acknowledge our need for Divine aid. After this, G-d reaches a hand earthward and returns His respect for us with the eighth day of the holiday, Shemini Atzeret. In initiating that last celebration, Hashem says to us, "Your departure is painful for Me."<sup>55</sup> Acknowledging dependence upon G-d does not take away from our value; if anything, it elevates us, and in this healthy relationship, G-d longs for our presence. May we develop the clarity of vision and confidence of spirit which will empower us to be humble, and so merit to celebrate Shemini Atzeret with our Creator.

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<sup>52</sup> Bereishit 11:4, and *Bereishit Rabbah* 38:6.

<sup>53</sup> See *Chullin* 89a, for a partial list of kings who were given power and became arrogant.

<sup>54</sup> Perhaps it is *especially* challenging regarding our Creator. In Mitzvah 33, the *Sefer haChinuch* presents the mitzvah of honoring one's parents as a stepping stone to feeling gratitude to G-d; we might find it easier to acknowledge our parents because our dependence upon them is not as total as our dependence upon G-d.

<sup>55</sup> Rashi to Vayikra 23:36.

# Sukkot: Unity and the Role of the Aravah

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## Sukkot: A Holiday of Unity?

A variety of sources attest to the prominent theme of unity on the holiday of Sukkot. The Talmud (*Sukkah* 27a) writes that from a halachic perspective, it is possible for the entire Jewish people to sit in one Sukkah, which some note is indicative of Sukkot's ability to metaphorically bring the Jewish people together. Moreover, it may not be coincidental that Sukkot is also the time when the mitzvah of *Hakhel* is observed. *Hakhel* requires the entire Jewish people to come together and learn Torah. Its fulfillment on the holiday of Sukkot may further reflect Sukkot's unique theme of unity.

Perhaps the most explicit source pointing to the theme of unity on Sukkot is in the *Midrash Rabbah* (Vayikra 30:12). The Midrash states that the four *minim* taken on Sukkot parallel four different types of Jews, as follows:

- **Etrog:** Both taste and smell - Jews with both Torah and good deeds
- **Lulav:** Taste but no smell - Jews with Torah but without good deeds
- **Hadassim:** Smell but no taste - Jews with good deeds but without Torah
- **Aravot:** No taste or smell - Jews with neither Torah nor good deeds

The Midrash concludes that Hashem commands the Jewish people to tie all four *minim* together, so that they can offer atonement for each other.

Despite the Midrash's clear encouragement of Jewish unity, the precise meaning and application of the Midrash is subject to debate. Is there a particular implementation of the value of unity that the Midrash is endorsing? Furthermore, Chazal record the *minhag* of separating the *aravah* from the other *minim* on Hoshana Rabbah and using only the *aravah* for the practice of 'chibbut' (striking the *aravah* on the ground).<sup>56</sup> This exclusive status that is assigned to the *aravah* is in spite of Chazal's identification of the *aravah* as the Jew who lacks Torah and good deeds. If unity is so important and its lessons so integral to the holiday of Sukkot, why is the *aravah* brought alone on Hoshana Rabbah? Finally, if one were to highlight one of the *minim* independent of the others, why choose the *aravah*!?

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<sup>56</sup> See Talmud *Sukkah* 44.

What follows are three approaches in understanding the Midrash about the four *minim* representing four types of Jews, with corresponding explanations as to the significance of taking the *aravah* on Hoshana Rabbah. While not necessarily mutually exclusive, each approach highlights a unique facet of the message of unity in the Midrash.

## Approach # 1: Understanding Unity

The Midrash clearly encourages a certain model of unity, one that involves an inclusionary stance towards others. The Midrash suggests that while the Jewish people is composed of a diverse group of individuals, the distinct and perhaps dissenting factions do not accurately reflect reality. Instead, the Jewish people is analogous to branches of a tree. While each branch has its own form, dimensions, and orientation, all branches actually emerge from one source.<sup>57</sup>

Some proponents of this view explain that this form of unity is based on a mystical perspective that the Jewish people are united by a shared soul.<sup>58</sup> An interesting application of this idea is maintained by R. Moshe Cordovero (*Tomer Devorah*, 1:4). R. Cordovero suggests that the Jewish people are intrinsically connected by virtue of the link between Jewish souls, and that this notion underlies the halachic concept of *arvut* (mutual responsibility for one another) (see Talmud *Shavuot* 39a).<sup>59</sup> According to R. Cordovero, the interconnectedness of Jewish souls enables one to help others fulfill halachic obligations even in a case when one has no personal obligation, and also has implications for interpersonal conduct. If all share one soul, commitment towards the religious and personal well-being of others is amplified.

Based on this approach, it is possible to suggest why the *aravah* is highlighted on Hoshana Rabbah. Throughout Sukkot, the concept of unity has been celebrated in a plethora of ways. Perhaps the culmination of this message is an unequivocal statement that even the *aravah*, corresponding to the Jew void of Torah and mitzvot, is genuinely valued by and connected to the rest of the Jewish people. Indeed, the Talmud (*Kiddushin* 36a) records R. Meir's opinion that Jews retain their status as G-d's children even if they do not perform His will. Though certain actions cannot be justified from a halachic perspective, his presence should always be welcomed and cherished.

## Approach # 2: The Importance of Influencing

The Midrash concludes by noting that the merging of the *minim*, and symbolically the merging of diverse Jews, results in each subgroup atoning for the other. Ramchal (*Mesilat Yesharim* chap. 19) cites this Midrash as proof that Hashem has no desire for the wicked to perish. "Rather, it is incumbent upon the pious to try and enhance their standing and to atone for them."<sup>60</sup> According to the Ramchal, this atonement is achieved, at least in part, by the more righteous positively influencing the spiritually impoverished.

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<sup>57</sup> See R. Eliyahu Schlesinger, *Eleh Hem Moadai* pg. 416.

<sup>58</sup> See R. Schlesinger (ibid). Support for this approach is cited from *Noam Elimelech, Parashat Devarim*.

<sup>59</sup> See the commentary *ViHalachta BiDerachav* on the *Tomer Devorah* (ad loc) for an elaboration of this point.

<sup>60</sup> Translation from the Feldheim edition, pg. 141.

Others further develop the theme of the *minim* as representative of the spiritually-focused Jew influencing the less religiously-inclined. *Nezer HaKodesh*<sup>61</sup> notes that curiously, the *etrog* is not tied together with the *lulav*, *hadassim*, and *aravot*. Rather, the three latter *minim* are bound together, while the *etrog* is unfastened and held in the other hand. The *Nezer HaKodesh* therefore posits that the atonement that is achieved must not stem from the influence of the *etrog*, which parallels the Jew filled with Torah and good deeds. Rather, it is the *lulav* and *hadassim*, neither of which possesses the pristine combination of both ‘taste’ and ‘smell’, that are bound with the *aravah* and positively influence their surroundings. Implied in this interpretation of the Midrash is that even the Jew represented by *lulav* and *hadassim*, even the Jew who has not yet attained absolute religious piety, has the ability to positively influence others.

What emerges is a most powerful lesson. At times, one may feel unworthy of serving as a positive role model, lest others learn from one’s imperfections. The Midrash counters this assumption by emphasizing that when an individual has spiritual bounty to offer, he or she should share this treasure with others, even if one has not yet achieved spiritual perfection. While one should always be striving for increased personal growth and should never idealize one’s personal flaws, it is incumbent upon all to have a positive impact and influence in any way possible.

This approach may highlight another perspective on the meaning behind the *aravah*’s solo performance on Hoshana Rabba. Though one may have learned and grown extensively under the influence of righteous and dedicated teachers, the goal is not to forever remain dependent upon mentors. The other *minim* promote the spiritual growth of the *aravah* throughout the seven days of Sukkot, but then, come Hoshana Rabba, they take a step back and empower the *aravah* to stand on its own. Similarly, the greatest teacher is not one whose students are so moved that dependency on the teacher is cultivated. Rather, the ultimate goal of education is, arguably, to produce lifelong learners with the disposition and skills to continue to learn and grow independently.

### Approach # 3: An Alternate Read of the Midrash

A highly original and alternate understanding of the Midrash is offered by The Lubavitcher Rebbe (see *Likutei Sichot* Vol. 29, pg. 223-225). The Lubavitcher Rebbe challenges the simple reading of the Midrash, namely, that the *minim* correspond to Jews with and without Torah and good deeds. For example, the Lubavitcher Rebbe questions the category of the Jew who has Torah but no good deeds. One who doesn’t have good deeds cannot be viewed as truly and authentically possessing Torah. Instead, the Lubavitcher Rebbe assumes that all groups mentioned in Midrash possess knowledge of Torah and are morally upright individuals.

How, then, does the the Lubavitcher Rebbe understand the categories that are outlined in the Midrash? The Lubavitcher Rebbe suggests that the Midrash is not establishing categories based on the *presence or absence* of Torah and good deeds. Rather, it is highlighting differences based on the *nature* of the Torah and good deeds. Each person has a different set of qualities and characteristics through which he or she serves G-d. Each individual has strengths and

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<sup>61</sup> See *Otzar Michtivei Kodesh Chelkat Yehoshua* pg. 42-43.

weaknesses. The Midrash is not focusing as much on Jewish unity as it is on the value of alternate approaches to serving Hashem.

Some approach Torah learning and living with astute intellectual capacities. Others experience religious observance through the prism of their heightened interpersonal sensitivity. The Jew associated with the *aravah* may appear to be lacking in intellectual and emotional sophistication, and for that reason lacks “taste” and “smell.” However, such a Jew may possess a distinct and unique quality- that of a very powerful, albeit simple, connection with Torah and mitzvot. Throughout Sukkot, the Minim are brought together and many different ways of connecting to Torah are celebrated. However, it is natural that those decorated with badges and titles and awards receive the most attention and accolade. On Hoshana Rabba, we ensure that the quiet and simple *aravah* has not been overlooked. The *aravah’s* unadulterated simplicity in dedication to religious observance may not contain the elegance of the intellectually or emotionally sophisticated, but the unwavering commitment is dazzling in its own right.

## Conclusion

The Midrash above states that the four *minim* are representative of four types of Jews, and through their unification, a powerful atonement can be achieved. Three approaches in understanding this Midrash have been shared, as well as corresponding explanations of the practice of highlighting specifically the *aravah* on Hoshana Rabba. These explanations can be summarized as follows:

	<b>Application of Ideas to the Midrash</b>	<b>Based on the Midrash, Why is the Aravah Highlighted on Hoshana Rabbah?</b>
<b>R. Moshe Cordovero</b>	All Jews are mystically united by one soul, despite different levels of religious practice.	Unequivocal statement that even the Jew void of Torah / good deeds is holy and special
<b>Ramchal and Nezer Hakadosh</b>	Importance of trying to have a positive influence on others.	After the <i>aravah</i> has been positively influenced for seven days, it is able to stand on its own and grow and succeed independently.
<b>Lubavitcher Rebbe</b>	All Jews referred to in Midrash learn and live Torah, but different people connect to service of G-d in different ways.	Don’t overlook or underappreciate the simple, committed Jew.

The Ba’al Shem Tov once suggested that each person must experience a personal redemption before the Jewish people can experience a national redemption. May we achieve our own spiritual success while inspiring others through our behavior. May we merit the ultimate unification of the Jewish people with the rebuilding of *sukkat David hanofalet*, the Beit Hamikdash, in Jerusalem, the *ir she-chubrah lah yachdav*, the city of unity.

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