

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd you shall take for yourself on the first day [a lulav and esrog]" (Vayikra 23:40). The Midrash (Tanchuma Emor 22 and Vayikra Rabbah 30:7) tells us that the Torah is referring to the day we take the lulav and esrog as "the first [day] for the calculation of sins." The obvious question is why this day, the 15th of Tishray, would be considered the first day of sin, if Yom Kippur, when our sins are forgiven, was on the 10th of Tishray. What about all of the sins committed between Yom Kippur and Succos? Don't they "count" too?

The Tur (O"C 581), after quoting the Tanchuma, in what would seem to be a continuation of the Midrash, adds, "on the night after Yom Kippur they (the nation of Israel) are involved in the mitzvos of succah and lulav and are not committing sins. Therefore the first day of the holiday (of Succos) is called the "first for the calculation of sins." The common, and what appears to be the most straightforward, understanding of the Tur is that we are just too busy to sin. It is only after we have finished building the succah and have acquired and put together the four species (the lulav, esrog, hadasim and aravos), as well as taking care of any other Yom Tov preparations (such as shopping and cooking), that we have any time available (or perhaps energy left) to sin. It's as if it is by default that only after the holiday starts do we begin sinning again. However, this approach raises several difficulties.

For starters, although the Midrash Rabbah does mention that "from Yom Kippur until the holiday all of Israel is busy with mitzvos; this one is busy with his succah and this one is busy with his lulav," the Tur quotes the Tanchuma by name, and in the Tanchuma's version (both the Warsaw and Buber editions) there is no mention of being busy with mitzvos to infer that we are too distracted by them to sin. Instead, the Tanchuma says that "on the first day of Yom Tov they take their lulav and praise G-d, who accepts it and forgives them and says to them 'I have disregarded all of your earlier sins, but a new record (of sins) begins now.'" The implication is clear; it is not the lack of sins that causes the new start on Succos, but the mitzvah of taking the lulav and praising G-d. The context of the Midrash Rabbah implies the same thing; first G-d tells

us on Yom Kippur that "what happened, happened, the new record starts now," then we are busy with mitzvos (the above quote), followed by taking the lulav and esrog, which leads to G-d saying again "what happened, happened, the new record starts now."

Aside from the implication in the Midrashim that the "new record" starting on Succos is not a result of our being too busy to sin, the fact that the proclamation of a fresh start is repeated (first on Yom Kippur and then again on Succos) shows that there were in fact additional sins committed between Yom Kippur and Succos that needed to be overlooked and forgiven. Being that most of us go to work on those days, fighting traffic, competing for customers, and even (or perhaps especially) competing for the best esrog (etc.), it is difficult to say that we are really sin-free during these four days. And we do ask G-d to pardon our sins three times a day during this period too, starting from the Ma'ariv that follows immediately after Ne'ilah! Additionally, if the reason it is the "first day of the calculation of sins" is because we haven't sinned yet (because we were too busy), rather than being good news (that our sins are being forgiven yet again), it is really a warning ("be careful, because now you have the opportunity to sin, which you didn't have before because you were too busy"). The very fact that the first day of Succos is called "the first day of the *calculation* of sins" and not just "the first day of sinning" shows that it's not that we aren't sinning, it's that the sins will end up not counting. Which brings us back to our original question, albeit somewhat modified. Why is the first day of Succos the first day our sins count if Yom Kippur is the "Day of Atonement," not Succos? Why are we given another fresh start? And what role does our being "busy with the succah and lulav" play in our getting this additional "do-over?"

Last week ([www.aishdas.org/ta/5768/yom Kippur.pdf](http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5768/yom_Kippur.pdf)) I discussed Rav Eliyah Dessler's concept of "nekudas habechira" (Michtav Me'elياهو I, pgs. 113-116), and how each person has a limited sphere of "free will" within which he or she can choose between right and wrong. Many things fall outside of this sphere; sometimes there is no real "right or wrong" (such as things based purely on personal preference), sometimes the "right" thing is "chosen" not because there was an internal battle that was won, but because this person would never even consider doing anything else (for example, most people would never consider

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committing murder), and sometimes the "wrong" thing is "chosen" without a battle ever occurring, as that person isn't on the level to consider the alternative (such as most people raised in a secular home not keeping Shabbos or kosher). Every person has battles; where these battles occur will depend on the starting point (how one was raised coupled with their inborn character traits) and their subsequent choices. Choosing well moves the battlefield (the "nekudas habehira") up, so that it becomes easier to make further "right" choices while making things that until now were not even within range a possibility and pushing some "bad" choices outside of the sphere, where the person won't consider doing them anymore. By the same token, choosing "poorly" has the opposite effect, making additional "poor" choices easier, making really poor choices that are so bad that they wouldn't have even been considered now a possibility, and making "good" choices harder to make, with some now being out of range.

When we repent on Yom Kippur and are forgiven for our sins, although the stain of the actual sin is erased, its effect on the "nekudas habehira" is not automatically erased with it. Sure, the "nekuda" went up because of the teshuva (repenting), but not to the extent that every sin that was, or could be, committed because we are not on the level to even fight it are now within range. Perhaps we are on enough of a spiritual high as Yom Kippur ended not to do many sins (then), but as we move away from Yom Kippur and our spiritual high dwindles (by the minute, unfortunately), we revert to a "nekudas habehira" that is higher than it was, but not as high as it would have been had we never made all the bad choices we were just forgiven for. Yes, the sin itself is gone, and it is certainly possible to attain a high enough level of teshuva that our "nekudas habehira" takes a quantum leap to where it would have been had we chosen correctly each and every time. However, in most cases, for most people, the atonement attained on Yom Kippur is limited to much less.

So here we are, shortly after Yom Kippur, and our sins have been forgiven (including the ones we had no chance of even fighting, even though we had the chance to put ourselves in a situation where we could make it a battle). Nevertheless, we are still in a

predicament where there are many choices that are outside our "nekudas habehira" that could have been within it. How are we going to really start fresh if our sin count is going to start to rise before we can get to the point where we can fight all these battles? Well, since winning the battles we do have and fulfilling mitzvos every chance we get will raise our "nekuda" to the point where we have a fighting chance ("mitzvah goreret mitzvah"), we should start doing mitzvos! And, as if on cue, here comes a holiday full of mitzvos! If we jump at the opportunity and right after Yom Kippur get busy with mitzvos, we raise our "nekuda." Being busy also helps give us less time to sin, which would counteract the mitzvos vis-a-vis our "nekuda." G-d sees that we are doing what we can to raise our "nekuda," and responds by giving us another break, pardoning us for those sins committed after Yom Kippur that were outside our "nekuda," telling us that despite the fresh start granted on Yom Kippur, He is giving us another fresh start on Succot. We've gotten a jump-start on doing mitzvos, and another do-over for those things we weren't able (yet) to fight.

From now on, though, everything counts, so it is up to us to keep the momentum going. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

As is well known, the sages tell us that the seventy sacrifices of bulls on Succot represent the seventy nations of the world (Succah 55b). The link between the other nations and Succot appears explicitly in the Tanach, as we read in the Haftarah of the holiday, stating that in the future, "All of those who remain among the nations, who come to Jerusalem, will ascend every year to bow down to G-d, the King of Hosts, and to celebrate the holiday of Succot" [Zecharia 14:16]. Indeed, the link between the Gentile nations and the holiday of Succot is quite understandable, since the original definition of the holiday is as "the harvest festival" [Shemot 23:16], at the end of the agricultural season. Man's joy at the successful completion of his labors and his obligation to thank G-d for giving him the strength to acquire material goods are relevant not only to Bnei Yisrael but to the entire world. (This is in addition to the special significance of the holiday for Bnei Yisrael: "So that your generations will know that I settled Bnei Yisrael in Succot when I took them out of the land of Egypt" [Vayikra 23:43].)

Evidently the universal aspect of Succot is also connected to another element—the fact that during the reign of Shlomo the First Temple was completed on Succot. With respect to the dedication of the Temple, it is written, "They all gathered together with King Shlomo, all the men of Yisrael, in the month of Eitanim, which is the seventh month" [Melachim I 8:2]. This was

different from the Tabernacle, which was dedicated in Nissan: "And it happened during the first month, in the second year, on the first of the month, that the Tabernacle was erected" [Shemot 40:17]. The different dates of dedication for the Tabernacle and the Temple reflect an essential difference between the two structures. The Tabernacle was built by Bnei Yisrael and it was meant for their exclusive use. Therefore, the dedication was in Nissan, the month which represents the unique status of Yisrael and is a symbol of their special calendar, which begins in the month of Nissan.

The Temple, on the other hand, was meant from the very beginning to play a broader role. In his dedication prayer, Shlomo expresses the desire that the Temple will be a place visited by all the nations. "Even the Gentile who is not from Your nation Yisrael will come from far lands because of Your name ... and he will pray towards this house. You will hear in heaven, the place where You dwell, and You shall do everything the Gentile asks, so that all the nations of the world will know Your name, and will fear You, just like Your nation Yisrael." [Melachim I 8:41-43]. Perhaps this also explains why some Gentiles participated in the construction of the Temple, including Chiram, the King of Tzor, and Chiram, the copper miner (whose father was a Gentile, according to the commentators).

In view of this, it is only natural that the Temple would be dedicated in Tishrei, which represents the end and the new beginning of the universal annual agricultural cycle ("the harvest festival at the end of the year, when you gather your produce from the field" [Shemot 23:16]). As Zecharia predicts, in the future all the Gentiles will come on Succot to bow down before G-d. And this will lead to the fulfillment of the ultimate goal? "And G-d will be king over the entire land. On that day G-d will be One and His name will be One." [Zecharia 14:9].

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

For some, the very idea of religion is paradoxical. On the one hand, we want to experience G-d, to soar to great spiritual heights. But on the other hand, we are often taken aback by the seemingly picayune details of our rituals: The precise quantity of wine necessary for the kiddush cup, the exact phrase to be substituted in our prayers during the ten days of Repentance - thousands of laws affecting every aspect of our lives. On the festival of Sukkot, the most universal of all Jewish celebrations, this paradox is muted, if not totally resolved.

The Bible commands us to take "four species" on Sukkot, which the Midrash classifies as to their taste/fragrance attributes. The etrog has both good taste and fragrance (Torah and good deeds), while the lulav's fruits, dates, have taste but no fragrance (just Torah). The hadas (myrtle) has an excellent aroma

(good deeds), but no taste at all. And the arava, the weeping willow, has neither taste nor fragrance.

When we make our blessing over them, these species are to be held together; even the weeping willow-Jew is included, and given an honored place together with his siblings, in one bond, aguda ahad. The commandment of the four species recognizes how all Jews, from the most learned to the most ignorant, from the most pious to the most removed from traditions, are part of a fundamental, and even halachic connection.

The physical structure of the sukka itself reflects the same principle. Its walls may be comprised of virtually any material; wood, metal, brick, objects which can become ritually defiled. But the roof may consist of only vegetation, matter which can never become ritually impure, an innate holiness, so to speak.

Thus, in the sukka's construction, we see the necessity of relying on two different elements working together, those born into holiness who are never defiled, and the more common reality of those whose lives risk potential defilement.

The story is told that Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev would invite all types of Jews into his sukka, simple people, beggars, even scoundrels. But the more established members of the community, the learned and the wealthy, felt uncomfortable around this motley crew. Reb Levi Yitzchok explained that Jewish tradition records that in the world to come, the holy Jews of all the generations would be gathering inside sukka of Leviathan, led by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses would be speaking words of Torah, Aaron would conduct the ritual and the songs of praise would be sung by King David.

But if the doorkeeper would demand to know what right Levi Yitzchok thought he could enter (because, after all, he was hardly of the caliber of the afore-mentioned spiritual giants of our nation), then he would answer that since he invited everyone, including the "lesser lights" into his sukka, wouldn't these true masters of our faith open their hearts and invite him into their sukka?

On Sukkot, we include everyone because we want G-d to include us. In effect, just as we forgive others (which is what placing all Jews in one bond means) G-d also forgives us. But there is another, more profound dimension to Sukkot, a celebration of nature and all of its implications.

Exposed to the elements, under the sky, a sukka is a nomad's hut. For seven days, the Torah commands us to leave our homes and enter the world of the ancient Israelites, a temporary dwelling where we eat, study Torah and even sleep.

In giving up the comforts of home and shedding rigidity, we sense a different part of our being; in a fragile hut, we become more fragile and see how everything in nature has its place and purpose.

Invariably, the perfection of creation helps us look differently upon those Jews who run from the sight of a synagogue, universal spirits who often feel constrained by walls and pews. We understand better Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook's teaching that the messiah will come because of Jews who may not keep the external details of the commandment, but are nevertheless deeply committed to the internal national bond of all Jews. (Letters, No. 555).

Rav Kook exhorts us to learn from every human being, even those who look like sinners. In the early years of this century, when faced with hard working farmers freeing the soil, the Chief Rabbi of Israel embraced them all into his concept of spirituality. In his work *Arpelei Tohar* (Clouds of Purity), Rav Kook speaks of the highest sanctity being the "sanctity of silence," a sanctity which transcends words (even the words of prayer), a sanctity which encompasses every aspect of life, from the inanimate to the life which pulses through the veins of every human being." This sanctity reaches into the depths of every creature, expressing the bond of all with, and within, all.

But a collision was inevitable. If the person who feels "this universality of holiness," Rav Kook continues, "this sanctity of silence, the sanctity of universal-ism. . . will then descend into the narrow service of the particular ritual, to prayer, to even a word of Torah, to any kind of narrow and restricted emphasis on a detail of the law, he will suffer and become depressed, he'll feel that his soul which is filled with the sanctity of all existence is being depressed by pin-cers . . . forced into a certain narrow road at a time when all of the roads seem opened before him in the way of sanctity, all of them filled with light."

Placing these non-observant pioneers on a pinnacle of spiritual excellence was revolutionary. Obviously, Rav Kook saw a light which most observant people could not see. But on Sukkot, we can all catch a glimpse of Rav Kook's vision. We understand that the Torah encompasses every human being, every idea, every emotion, all of creation. This is the deepest joy of Torah, the Torah of Sukkot, in which there is room for the pure and the impure, the good and the not so good, from the smallest weeping willow-Jew to the greatest sages of the age.

Still, what do we say to a great soul who cannot be burdened with 'bureaucratic' religious details? The following analogy may help: On a clear night, I can often manage to see stars hundreds of light years away, but on a cloudy night I may not be able to see anything at all. However, if I learn the laws of optics and build a telescope, I will see much further and clearer. But acquiring a telescope has its price. There are many facts to learn regarding its proper use, and an object comprised of countless details is placed between the eye and the world. But just look at the added vision it provides! The laws of the Torah are like this telescope

(or microscope) into reality. It seems constrictive, but it's really liberating.

On Sukkot, we embrace the stargazers who shun telescopes, we open our hearts and invite them into the sukka but at the same time we know how sharper our vision is when we look at the stars through the gaps (required by halacha) in the roof of the sukka.

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RABBI BARUCH LEFF

Kol Yaakov

Yes, we all are entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Life and liberty come easily, but it seems that while we indeed pursue happiness throughout our lives, true and lasting joy evades us.

What is the secret to happiness? How can we avoid depression? As always, the Torah has the answers to our struggles and this time it is found in a profound understanding of the holiday of Sukkot.

We can begin to discover what the meaning of Sukkot is from the special prayers we recite on the holiday. In the main blessing of *Shemoneh Esrai*, we describe Sukkot as *Zman Simchateinu*-the Season of Our Joy. This does not mean that we enjoy ourselves in this season, (although we may love Sukkot and the pleasures of eating outdoors). Rather, the explanation is that Sukkot is a time when we can access true joy and bring it within ourselves.

A holiday is never merely a memorial for an event but a marking in time of when, due to a historical event, we changed as a nation in our very nature and soul. Every year when we meet the holiday once again we are given access to potential qualities and to grow in ways that we were not capable of doing before the festival. The holiday increases the reach of our souls.

On Sukkot, the historical event is that we dwelled in Sukkot or huts, during the 40 year sojourn in the desert after we left Egypt. G-d tells us to observe the holiday, "So that your generations will know that I placed the Children of Israel in huts to dwell therein" (*Vayikra* 23:43). What is the significance of this event?

The focus seems to be, "I placed the Children of Israel in huts to dwell therein." G-d Himself directly put us in our "homes" in the desert and was distinctly involved in our lives. The Jewish people in the desert lived with a clear reality of G-d's presence. They witnessed daily miracles such as manna falling from heaven and water coming out of rocks. The Clouds of Glory enveloped their entire camp, protecting them from intruding enemies and bad weather. The Sukkah is actually built to remind us specifically of these Clouds of Glory as stated in *Talmud Sukkah* 11a. There was a special closeness between G-d and the Jewish people in the desert and when we leave our homes and go out to live in our Sukkot, we are reminded of that unique 40-year clear connection that we had with G-d.

This is why Sukkot is called the Season of Joy. You can't live with the clarity of G-d's presence without becoming a happier and different kind of person. Living with G-d in a Sukkah, even in our times, indicates that G-d provides. And whatever I have is not based on my own talents but what G-d is giving me. I'm not a success or failure. I can only try my best and G-d will decide if I succeed. We are always living in a Sukkah, in G-d's dwelling. We are never alone.

If you know that G-d is with you through all of life's struggles and that He is personally sending you any challenges that arise, you can more easily accept them in stride. G-d is Ultimate Goodness and He will never send any challenge if it is without a constructive purpose. These ideas comfort us during difficult times, allowing us to maintain equilibrium and happiness.

We are used to thinking that happiness must be triggered, that we cannot bring happiness to ourselves. If I have a child, I am happy. If I win the lottery, I am joyful. But the truth is quite the opposite. Joy is not based on what we are given in our lot in life. We can increase our own joy. If we are being commanded to celebrate a holiday and experience a season of joy, we are being told by G-d that joy is not a reaction to outside events but something we can bring to ourselves.

How do we bring joy into our lives? This is an art we must learn and Sukkot is the time of year when we can access it. Sukkot then becomes the most crucial holiday in terms of dealing with life.

We all know that everything depends on attitude. Take this example: Two patients are in an old age home. One says, "Thank G-d, my family cares so much about me. Not a week goes by without a visit and when they come they always bring something! It could be an apple or a candy."

The other patient says, "What a horrible family I have. Once a week is all the time they have for me, after all I have done for them as a mother? All I'm worth is a candy or an apple!"

They're describing the same thing, yet they're describing opposite experiences. The essential ingredient of our joy is not what we have but what we are and how we think. We can strive to have more but we must also love what we have already. Even simple, commonplace pleasures must be highlighted.

There is a Yiddish story written solely about an orange. It is called The Morantz, "The Orange." The orange was received as a present on Purim in Russia. Oranges in that part of the world were rare in the 1800's. The first day people from all over town came to look at it. Wow! What an unbelievable sight!

The second day they came to smell it-an incredible aroma. The next day they peeled it, saving each piece of peel with care in order to make marmalade. Then they divided the sections of the orange and crushed it in their mouths, feeling the

delicious juices. An incredible experience. And then they had the marmalade that lasted for weeks. A memory for a lifetime-the Orange.

Most of the time, we hardly stop to even notice the blessing and the pleasurable taste of the food we are eating. Oftentimes, before we realize it, we are finished eating without having focused on an appreciation for the pleasure that G-d has given us. We must focus on the many pleasures we enjoy already in order to attain happiness.

This is what the Mishna states in Avot 4:1, "Who is rich? One who takes pleasure and joy in his lot." Bill Gates is not necessarily the richest man in the world. You can have a net worth of 50 billion dollars but if you don't enjoy and appreciate your wealth and are always looking for ways to get more, you will never be happy nor rich. A homeless man may only have \$100 to his name but if he is satisfied with it and counts his blessings, he is richer than you.

On Sukkot, by going out of homes to a temporary dwelling, we show that we don't need all of our material possessions to be happy. Happiness is not based on having but is based on being and enjoying. We train ourselves to appreciate the very basics of life. Whatever we have is appreciated and enjoyed.

Our taking and waving the Four Species on Sukkot also expresses an aspect of joy. The Midrash Rabbah (30:12) in Emor sees in the Four Species a oneness in the diversity of the Jewish people. The etrog (citron) has taste and fragrance, representing Jews who possess knowledge and good deeds. The lulav (palm branch) has taste but no fragrance, symbolizing Jews who have knowledge without righteous deeds. The hadas (myrtle branch) possesses only fragrance, representing those who have good deeds without knowledge. Finally, the aravah (willow branch) has neither taste nor smell because some Jews have neither good deeds nor knowledge.

We take all these species, which together represent the entire Jewish people, and we proclaim a oneness with all types of Jews. We accept upon ourselves the fostering of relationships with the totality of the Jewish people. We realize that everyone contributes to the nation and we attempt to see the positive qualities in other people rather than the negatives. This brings joy to ourselves and to others.

This concept of focusing on the positives of others is also learned from the order of sacrifices that is brought on Sukkot. Throughout the holiday, we bring 70 sacrifices, corresponding to the 70 nations of the world. (The Torah views the nations of the world as 70 roots with many other nations as branches.) This is because we see all nations of the world as important. Each has a specific role to fulfill in G-d's world and we pray to G-d, through these offerings, that He inspire them to true service of Him. It is especially on Sukkot that we do this because, as mentioned, it is called "The Season

of Rejoicing." When we are happy with ourselves, we look at the world positively and can see good in others, even other nations, even if those nations are presently our enemies.

Sukkot is perhaps the most important time of year. It is a time when we receive divine help in attaining happiness and joy. Without happiness, life can be one long misery. G-d will grant us this assistance as long as we show Him that we are trying to access it.

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Sukkot is the only festival referred to as zeman simhateinu, the time of happiness in our liturgy.

The Torah in its last description of the festivals, mentions the word simcha twice when discussing Sukkot. (Deuteronomy 16:14, 15) This in contrast to Shavuot where it appears only once. (Deuteronomy 16:11) On Passover, the word is totally absent. (Deuteronomy 16:1-8) Sukkot is described in the liturgy as the days of happiness, as the term simcha is most associated with this holiday. Why is Sukkot deemed as the ultimate holiday of happiness and joy?

On a historical level, Sukkot is the culmination of the three festivals. Passover is the holiday of physical freedom. Yet, freedom without purpose is void of happiness; hence the word simcha is not linked to Passover. Shavuot gives meaning to our freedom since on that day, we received the Torah. Hence simcha is mentioned in reference to Shavuot. Sukkot takes us to another dimension. Real joy occurs when one is able to sustain meaning in life well beyond the dramatic moments. As Sukkot is a commemoration of the fragile homes in which we lived during the 40 years in the desert, this holiday represents the maintenance of belief, even beyond the experience at Sinai. So, the Torah mentions simcha twice relative to Sukkot.

On an agricultural level, Sukkot teaches another important lesson about happiness. The ultimate holiday of gathering our produce is Sukkot. Thus, the festival is called Hag ha-asif. The Torah, immediately preceding the laws of the holidays in Deuteronomy, mentions the laws of giving tithes. (Ch. 14:22) This serves as a reminder that true happiness is achieved when one takes of what one has gleaned and gives it to another. Most people believe that happiness is achieved by taking more. The reverse is true. The more one gives, the more one experiences exhilaration of having given of themselves to others. In the end, happiness is a feeling. Giving, on the other hand, is an action. While one cannot automatically achieve an emotion, each of us has it in our power to act. Through action, feelings emerge. In the case of Sukkot, from giving of our produce, happiness surfaces.

Not coincidentally, Sukkot comes on the heels of Rosh Hashanah, when we wish each other Shana

Tovah. Shana Tovah is commonly translated, "have a happy year." This translation, in fact is a take-off of the American New Year, when happiness is the only goal. In truth, Shana Tovah does not mean "happy new year," but "good new year." In fact, not everything that is happy is good and not everything that is good is happy. When we wish each other a Shana Tovah, what we are really saying is, "may you have a year of doing good." By experiencing a High Holidays of tov, of goodness, and internalizing the message of Sukkot, we can ultimately realize the description of Sukkot as found in our prayers-zman simhateinu, the time of true joy.

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Sukkot comes at the exact right time of the year, psychologically and emotionally speaking. If it were not for the advent of Sukkot and all of the preparations involved regarding this festival of joy and happiness, we would all be very depressed at having to climb down from the pinnacle of Yom Kippur to everyday mundane existence.

The Torah allows us to contemplate our future year with a sense of happiness and satisfaction. The sukkah signifies the protection that the Lord will provide us with for the whole coming year. Though the actual sukkah may be small and relatively flimsy as compared to our homes, it nevertheless symbolizes faith, serenity and confidence in the eternity of Israel and its Torah.

The four species of vegetation that are an integral part of Sukkot reinforce our appreciation of the beauty of G-d's world. It reminds us that the world can be a Garden of Eden and we should endeavor not to destroy it or be expelled from it.

The different species represent the harmony of nature, the flash of its color and its built in symbiotic nature. Whereas pagans worshipped nature, Judaism stressed its role as being one of the great wonders of G-d's creation.

Abraham had it right when he stated that people wonder at the magnificence of a beautiful building but ignore the genius of the architect that designed it. Judaism, while always impressed by the wonder of the building itself, always looks intently to recognize and acknowledge the architect behind it.

Sukkot helps remind us of the necessity to always search for that architect in all of the facets of our lives and world. Sukkot also reveals clearly our dependence upon Heaven for rain - for water. Without water in abundance, life cannot function and grow. The Torah tells us that the Lord sent us purposely into a land where water is a precious commodity. There are no great rivers or giant lakes that appear on the

landscape of the Land of Israel. We are therefore dependent on the winter season's rains.

We pray on Sukkot for those rains to be abundant, gentle and saturating. Rain has a cleansing effect not only on the air we breathe but on the life spirit that exists within us. Hence its deep association with the joy of Sukkot.

Rain and water also symbolize Torah and purification. Moshe, in his final oration to Israel, states that his words of Torah should be felt as gentle rain and dew descending on the Holy Land. The prophet Yeshayahu compares Torah to water as does King David in Tehillim.

The holiday of Sukkot reinforces this connection with its own link to Simchat Torah, the day that marks the conclusion of this great and noble holiday period. For as obvious as it is that the Land of Israel cannot survive and prosper without water, so too the people of Israel will be unable to prosper and survive without an attachment to Torah, its commandments and values. The message of Sukkot is the perfect conclusion to the spirituality of Yom Kippur.

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DR. NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

Let's work with the first ma'amar of 5634.

A central feature of the sukka-indeed, the feature that gives the sukka its name-is the sekhach (the materials used to make the roof of the sukka). The Sfas Emes begins by showing us something that is totally obvious once he has pointed it out; but was totally non-obvious until he did so. The Sfas Emes notes that the sukka resembles a chupa (wedding canopy). And just as the wedding ceremony under the chupa completes the binding of a wife and her husband together, so, too, the sukka completed the sanctification (the kiddushin) of our special relationship with HaShem. For, continues the Sfas Emes, HaShem's taking us out of Egypt was in the nature of a marriage. Thus, HaShem says (Vayikra, 22:32-33): "Ani HaShem me'kadish'chem, ha'motzi es'chem meiEretz Mitzrayim...". (ArtScroll: "I am HaShem Who sanctifies you, Who took you out of the land of Egypt...")

As you see, faithful to its mission of presenting the pshat pashut-the simple rendering of the text-ArtScroll reads the word "me'kadish'chem" as "sanctifies". By contrast, faithful to his mission-giving us access to new, mind-stretching insights-the Sfas Emes is reading "me'kadish'chem" as "Who has taken you as His wife." This is standard usage for the word "me'kadesh"; for example, in the expression "chupa ve'kiddushin". And with the Sfas Emes's reading of

me'kadish'chem, the sekhach on top of the sukka becomes the chupa of Bnei Yisroel with HaShem.

But in the Heavenly Court, kitrug (criticism) is heard: Why should Bnei Yisroel be selected over all other nations for this special relationship with HaShem? Looking objectively at the proposed shidduch, one might conclude that it was unfair. Even worse, the shidduch did not seem to make sense as a viable long-term relationship. Note that the issue of Klal Yisroel's special relationship with HaShem-our being the "chosen people"-continues to bother some people to this very day.

The Sfas Emes draws our attention to the way HaShem-the presumptive choson (bridegroom) -- dealt with this criticism concerning His singling out Bnei Yisroel to be His kallah (bride) The Choson reacted not with words or with reasoning. Rather, recognizing that what was involved love-which can be impervious to words or to reasoning-the Choson reacted by proceeding swiftly to the wedding ceremony. That is, by having us come forward immediately to the chupa! Thus, recounting what happened soon after the Exodus, HaShem tells us (VaYikra 23, 43): "Ki ba'sukkos ho'shavti es Bnei Yisroel behotzi'i o'sam MeiEretz Mitzrayim." ("For when I took Bnei Yisroel from the Land of Egypt, I had them dwell in Sukkos".)

The Sfas Emes has given us a powerful "take-home" lesson to deepen our understanding and enjoyment of the Yom Tov. The message is simple: when we enter the Sukka, we should feel the sentiments that a choson (or a kallah) feels when he/she stands under the chupa.

What might those sentiments be? Three possibilities come to mind. One possibility is a feeling of great joy. That state of mind comes from being next to one's beloved, with whom he/she is about to commit for a lifetime together.

Another possibility-these are not mutually exclusive-involves one's relationship with HaShem. That is, standing under the chupa, a person may feel great gratitude to the One Who made the shidduch. In turn, this sense of gratitude can bring the person extraordinarily close to HaShem. Indeed, so close that this is a very favorable time to daven for any special request.

A third possibility for a person's feelings under the chupa also comes to mind. He/she may be quivering with doubts about the wisdom of the step that he/she are taking. This case resembles the experience of HaShem and Bnei Yisroel-the case that the Sfas Emes discussed earlier in this ma'amar. There, too, there was cause for much uncertainty about the suitability of the marriage.. Chazal tell us that bringing a couple together in marriage is similar to the miracle of splitting Yam Suf. As we know, that miracle had to be triggered by a leap of faith: "Nachshon kofatz le'soch hayam". So, too, recall how the choson and kallah

discussed earlier in this ma'mar dealt with their uncertainty and doubts about the shidduch. They have questions and doubts. They plunged forward, committing to a deeper, more solid relationship, one which-history has shown-could be made to last forever.

A Post Script.

As we have seen, the Sfas Emes views the choson and kalla coming together under a canopy as a symbol that concludes acquiring something. In the present case, he has in mind HaShem's kinyan of Bnei Yisroel. But to conclude his discussion of this issue, he cites another case in which someone completed a kinyan by providing sukkos.

The context in that other case is Ya'akov Avinu's return from Lavan to Eretz Yisroel. The Sfas Emes quotes the pasuk in Bereishis (33:17): "... u'lemik'neihu ahsa Sukkos." (ArtScroll: "... and for his cattle, he made shelters.") The Sfas Emes notes the "sound-alikes" ("mi'kneihu" = "his cattle"; "kinyan" = "an acquisition"). Accordingly, he makes the obvious word-associations. Thus he reads this phrase as saying: "... he made sukkos for what he had acquired." The Sfas Emes offers us this non-pshat in support of his idea that a sukka can complete and solidify a relationship. Truly a thought to bear in mind when we dwell in our Sukka this Yom Tov. © 2007 Dr. N.C. Leff & torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Somebody's a Nobody

One of the most joyous customs associated with the holiday of Sukkos is the celebration of Simchas Bais Hashoevah. In the times of the Bais HaMikdash, a water libation accompanied the customary offerings. Simchas Bais Hashoevah, literally, the Joy of the Water Drawing, was observed with a most ebullient celebration. It included a marvelously varied array of harps, lyres, cymbals, and trumpets, among other instruments. The greatest sages and most pious of rabbis performed acrobatics and antics that would have normally been below their dignity. In fact, the sages in Tractate Sukkah 51, note that, "one who has not seen the celebration of the Bais Hashoevo has never seen true joy."

Rambam (Maimonides) discusses this aspect of exuberance and adds that "one who in his insolence restrains himself from serving Hashem in a joyous manner is a sinner and fool." Yet the Rambam adds a caveat. "But this joy was not performed by the ignorant ones and by anyone who wanted (to dance). Only the great sages of Israel, the heads of Yeshivos and the Sanhedrin, the pious, the elders and men of righteous action would dance, clap, and sing in the Bais haMikdash on Sukkos. Everyone else, men and women would come to watch and listen" (Rambam Hilchos Lulav 8:14).

This passage begs explanation. Why shouldn't everyone, even the most profane of men, sing and

dance and make merry in celebration of the L-rd? Further what does the Rambam mean by not including "those who want to dance"?

Ultimately, anyone who ended up dancing, even the most pious of sages, obviously wanted to dance. What, then, does he Rambam mean when he said that this joy was not performed by anyone who wanted to dance? A classic story circulates in all Jewish humor anthologies.

Before the start of the Ne'eilah service, the holiest and final supplication of Yom Kippur, the rabbi rose from his seat and bolted toward the Holy Ark. He spread his hands toward heaven and cried out, "Ribbono Shel Olam, Master of the Universe, I am a total nothing before you! Please inscribe me in the book of life!"

All of a sudden the chazzan (cantor) ran toward the Aron and joined the rabbi! "G-d Almighty," he shouted, "please forgive me, too, for I am truly a nothing before you!" There is an awed silence amongst the congregants.

The shammas (sexton) then followed suit. He, too, ran up toward the ark and in tearful supplication pronounced, "I too am a nothing!"

Mouths around the congregation dropped open. The President of the synagogue's men's club, Ed Goldstein, a large man, was also caught up in the fervor of the moment. Suddenly, he, too, bolted from his seat in the back, and lumbered toward the front of the shul. With great eagerness he prostrated himself in front of the Ark and cried out at the top of his lungs. "Forgive me Oh L-rd he shouts, for I too am a nothing! Suddenly a shout from the back of the synagogue was directed toward Goldstein's hulk of a figure. It shouted with incredulity. "Harrumph! Look who thinks he's a nothing!"

Rambam teaches us that whoever runs to dance and sing and make himself crazy is not truly lowering himself before the Almighty. If someone inherently likes to cavort wildly, then he is not dancing for the sake of lowering himself before the Almighty, rather he is having a wonderful time. When King David liberated the Aron (Ark of the Covenant) from the Phillistines, he danced in front of it as if he were a lowly slave. When confronted by his wife, Michal, for dancing like a servant, he retorted. "I would make myself even lower before Hashem."

When rejoicing during the festivities we must bear in mind our true reasons for enthusiasm -- who we are, and why we dance. Because in order to be a nobody, you gotta be a somebody. © 1999 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & Project Genesis, Inc.

