

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“On Succos, [the world] is judged regarding water” (Rosh Hashanah 1:2 and 16a).

According to the Mishnah, the amount of water each locale will get over the coming year is determined over Succos, which is one of the four judgment periods. Although all four periods are significant (as the success of the produce and fruits we are judged about on Pesach and Shavuos greatly affect the world, and the judgment each and every individual gets on Rosh Hashanah obviously impacts each person), it is easy to see how important the judgment about water is. The amount of rain that falls directly impacts not only how the crops will grow, but too much (as anyone who lives in a flood-area can attest) or too little (as anyone who lives where there are wild fires can attest) can bring about much devastation.

Even though crops are directly affected by the amount of water-so there is some overlap between the judgment that occurs on Succos and the judgments that occur on the other two "legs" of the Shalosh Regalim-there are other factors that affect crops as well (such as infestation and temperature), thereby necessitating separate judgments. The judgment on Rosh Hashanah, on the other hand, seems to be all inclusive. How can there be a separate judgment on Succos regarding water, if the effect it will have on people is pre-empted by the judgments that were sealed within the past week?

Meiri (Rosh Hashanah 16a, see also Turay Even) distinguishes between things that affect a person's body (such as sickness and disease) and things that are external to a person (even if they affect him). The judgment on Rosh Hashanah only pertains to those things that occur to the person himself, leaving room for separate judgments on water, produce, and fruits. Nevertheless, since each of these things has a direct and major impact on the body, the overlap may be too great to overcome.

According to Tosfos (Rosh Hashanah 16b, d"h V'nechtamin), the judgment that occurs on Rosh Hashanah only pertains to the world to come. This is not how most understand it, but if the decrees issued on Rosh Hashanah do not affect what happens in this world, there is no overlap with any decrees made that

only apply to what will happen in the coming year in this world.

Ritva (Rosh Hashanah 16a, see also Ramban's D'rasha L'Rosh Hashanah) references an opinion that differentiates between the amount of food and water that will be available based on the judgments that occur on the Shalosh Regalim, and how much each person will be able to benefit from them (i.e. some will be satiated by it, while others will not be). Although both Ritva and Ramban reject this opinion, and bring much support for their opinion that everything is based on the judgments that occur on Rosh Hashanah, they do not explain how the Mishnah could include all four judgment periods. (Perhaps they think the Mishnah, like Tosfos, thought the judgments on Rosh Hashanah do not pertain to this world.) Ran makes a similar distinction, suggesting that the amount of rain that will fall, in general, is decided on Succos (et al), while the portion of it that will reach/affect each individual is determined by the judgment each person receives on Rosh Hashanah.

There is a technical issue with Ran's approach, as a large portion of a person's share of the "pot" of produce allotted for the "k'lal" (general public) is dependent on judgments that have not yet occurred (for water, almost all of it hasn't been decided yet, since the judgment for water comes so soon after the personal judgments). Nevertheless, it is possible that on Rosh Hashanah it is determined what percentage of the total amount will benefit each individual (see Turay Even). The amount that had already been allotted for the "k'lal" that has not yet been received (because the fiscal year hasn't ended) is then apportioned to each individual based on their Rosh Hashanah judgment, as is each person's percentage of what the "k'lal" will get when the new fiscal year begins. According to this model, specific amounts aren't determined on Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur, only the percentage; how much that percentage turns out to be depends on what will be decided at a later date (Succos, Pesach and Shavuos).

Last week, I discussed how decrees issued on Rosh Hashanah can be avoided or negated through repentance, prayer and charity (<http://rabbidmk.posterous.com/yom-kippur-5772>). Eitz Yosef understands these three to be vehicles through which we can attain "hashgacha p'ratis" (personal divine intervention), rather than being subject only to "hashgacha k'lalis" (decrees issued on behalf of the k'lal without taking into account how it affects each and

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every individual). The judgment on Rosh Hashanah is personalized based on each individual's actions (and inactions), even for those who, during other times of the year, are not worthy of "hashgacha p'ratis." This judgment determines whether or not G-d will "tweak" how that individual will be affected during the year by the decrees issued for the k'lal, but the starting point is what will happen based on "hashgacha k'lalis." [As it turns out then, even decrees issued on behalf of the k'lal did take into account how it affects each and every individual, as it was decided whether or not that specific affect, on that specific individual, would be allowed to occur. The difference (in this respect) between those worthy of "hashgacha p'ratis" and those who are not lies in how adverse the effect of "hashgacha k'lalis" must be before G-d intervenes.]

As soon as a decree that is part of "hashgacha k'lalis" is issued, it becomes the starting point for all those within range of the specific decree (i.e. the area that will be flooded or that will experience a drought). One way to avoid the effects of a specific decree is to move out of the area the decree affects (which is one of the reasons why "shinuy makom," changing one's location, can "rip up" a decree, see Rosh Hashanah 16b). Another way is to merit "hashgacha p'ratis," whereby G-d will protect that individual from the adverse affects of "hashgacha k'lalis." Since the judgment on Rosh Hashanah determines whether G-d will adjust anything from the starting point of "hashgacha k'lalis," there is no need for the timing of this judgment to coincide with the judgment that determines what that starting point will be. On Pesach the world is judged regarding produce (i.e. grains), on Shavuot the world is judged regarding fruits, and on Succos the world is judged regarding water. On Rosh Hashanah each person is judged to determine how the results of those judgments will affect him. © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

*by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg,
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The community of Brisk has a custom of discussing matters of Agadda- stories that appear in the Talmud-in terms that come from the world of halacha. One example is their analysis of the subject of

the holiness of Bnei Yisrael. Is this like innate sanctity of an object, which can never be cancelled, or is it like a monetary sanctity which can be redeemed or which is cancelled if the object is used for an unholy purpose? The answer is that the halacha that a person of Yisrael remains a Jew even though he has sinned proves that the sanctity of Yisrael is a type of holiness that is innate and can never be cancelled.

"Can a woman forget her baby or her mercy for the fruit of her womb? These might be forgotten, but I will not forget." [Yeshayahu 49:15]. The Talmud explains that the community of Yisrael feared that the sin of the Golden Calf would forever be remembered, so the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to them, "These might be forgotten" (a hint of the verse, "These are your gods, Yisrael" [Shemot 32:4]), which is what the people of Yisrael cried out when they sinned. But the giving of the Torah will never be forgotten-"I will not forget you"-a hint of the first word of the Ten Commandments, "I am your G-d..." [Shemot 20:2].

This concept of innate sanctity of the body appears in the Midrash. "This can be compared to a king who divorced his wife. He went to a jeweler and instructed him to make some jewelry for her. A friend of the king heard about this, and he said to her, it seems that the king is thinking of taking you back, since I heard that he has asked the jeweler to make some jewelry for you. In the same way, Yirmiyahu rebukes Yisrael with his prophesy, "The evil will begin from the north" [1:14]. But he interrupts this by saying, 'This is what G-d says: I remember the kindness of your youth... Yisrael is holy to G-d, the first fruits of His crops.' [2:2-3]." [Bamidbar Rabba 2]. Thus, even when they are sinners they retain the properties of teruma and maaser, which are intrinsically holy and can never be redeemed and lose their sanctity.

The sages have taught us that the four species held on Succot can be compared to the organs of a body. The etrog is similar to a heart, and the heart represents the Holy One, Blessed be He, as is written, "The Rock of my heart" [Tehillim 73:26] -- see Shemot Rabba 2. They therefore comment that the verse "And you shall take a hadar fruit for you" [Vayikra 23:40] is a reference to the Holy One, Blessed be He, who is described by the phrase, "You have dressed in glory and majesty" (using the word "hadar") [Tehillim 104:1]. Thus, the etrog ("a hadar fruit") represents the Holy One, Blessed be He, who is eternally present within Yisrael.

An etrog can be used for the ritual only if it is kosher as a food, since the command is to "take a fruit... for you." An etrog which is teruma, set aside for a Kohen, can be used, since even a Yisrael, who cannot eat from it, can receive pleasure by giving it to a grandson of his who is a Kohen. Rashi adds, "But it cannot be redeemed, and anybody who says it can is evil" [Succah 34b]. Why does Rashi use such a harsh phrase to describe somebody who is mistaken in

understanding the Talmud? Perhaps we can say that Rashi is hinting at people who claim that Yisrael can be replaced, and that after the people sinned a new covenant was made with others. Thus, he writes that whoever says that teruma (Yisrael) can be redeemed is evil, a disciple of the one who made such a claim.

The last words of the Torah are, "And for all the strong hand... which Moshe performed before the eyes of all of Yisrael" [Devarim 34:12]. Rashi comments, "He decided to shatter the Tablets in front of them, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, agreed, and complimented him on that fact that he shattered them." And that is why we immediately read the beginning once again, "In the beginning of G-d's creation..." [Bereishit 1:1] -- as a hint of Yisrael, who are called "reishit"-the beginning-as is written, "Yisrael is holy to G-d, the first fruits of His crops" [Yirmiyahu 2:3], like teruma, which cannot be redeemed. Note that the last word in Rashi, "sheshavarta-which you shattered-has the same numerical value as "in the beginning of G-d's creation" (a value of 1202).

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**T**he true mission of the Sanctuary - or Succah - is to recreate and perfect the earth.

The three major festivals at this time of year - Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Succot - are filled with drama and pageantry; with the piercing sounds of the shofar and the pleasant fragrances of fruits, with the stark white of the Days of Awe and the glorious yellows and greens of the four species on Succot.

The season begins with the first day of the month which is Rosh Hashana, the anniversary of the creation of the world. The Bible describes it as a "day of the terua [broken sighing and sobbing sounds] of the shofar unto you" (Numbers 29:1).

Is it not strange that the Bible marks our remembrance of creation - world and light - with sounds from a ram's horn reminiscent of groans and wails? I suggest that the Bible is acknowledging the fact that our world is a vale of tears, that human beings are weak and sinful, and live in the shadow of inevitable death.

But there is another sound of the shofar - the exultant tekiya, which the Bible ordains is to be heard on Yom Kippur (10 Tishrei) on the 50th Jubilee year, during the celebration which marks the return of every individual to his familial homestead, frees all slaves and rescinds all debts, declaring liberty throughout the Land (Leviticus 25:8-13).

This victorious sound reflects the fundamental message of Judaism, the fact that the human being is not only formed from the dust of the earth but has also been "inspired" by the eternal breath of the Divine. The Jubilee year expresses our faith - which is a divine promise - that human beings have the innate power to

redeem themselves and the world, to re-create both the kingship of G-d and to bring about a perfected planet of peace and security which our prophets call the Messianic Age.

What we must do, however, is to develop the G-d rather than the beast within us by studying and practicing the teachings of G-d's Torah. And because we believe that the perfection of the world is within our grasp, we add two exultant tekiya sounds to every broken terua when we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashana. With these sounds we usher in our days of repentance.

Yom Kippur is the Day of Forgiveness. Hopefully by then we shall have successfully reached out to G-d, and experienced the nearness and goodness of His Presence. Yom Kippur is the climax of this magnificent feeling. It is not a sad fast day, but a joyous, liberating one; we become freed from the blandishments of food, drink and sexual relationships so that we can fully dwell - for a 25-hour period - in the house of G-d, "in order to see the sweetness of the Lord and to seek him out in His Tent" (Psalm 27). On Yom Kippur everyone becomes transported to the "world to come," the world of souls, where the souls of the dead and the souls of the living exist in a totally separate dimension.

With the advent of Succot four days later, we are ready to bring our new-found spirituality into this physical world, to re-create and perfect it. We leave our homes and enter a succah, symbolic of the tabernacle/sanctuary/Holy Temple which we are commanded to build on earth so that the Divine might dwell with humanity. And that Tabernacle is not only the earthly abode for G-d and Israel, it is a foretaste of a world at peace, a messianic age.

G-d initially appointed Bezalel as the architect of the Sanctuary. He "filled him with the spirit of G-d in wisdom, understanding and knowledge" Exodus 31:2-3). In Proverbs (3:19-20) the text describes how the Lord "established the earth with wisdom, set up the heavens with understanding, and split the deep to give forth water and the heavens to gently drop dew with knowledge."

Hence, the true mission of the Sanctuary - or succah - is to re-create and perfect the earth. That's why its architect had to be endowed with the same attributes the Almighty used to create the world.

And so on Succot we bring special vegetation - the Four Species - into the Synagogue/Temple, through whose vegetable roof we can see the stars.

And on the last day of the festival - Shmini Atzeret-Simhat Torah - we pray for G-d's life-giving waters and take Torah scrolls out into the streets so that every human being may accept the yoke of the heavenly kingship. So we have come full circle advancing from the broken terua to the glorious redemption of the world. © 2011 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

As I aided my grandson and two of his friends in helping erect and decorate our succah I was struck by the fact that not only had I aged and no longer enjoyed climbing ladders but that many of our succah decorations had also seriously aged, faded and some have even disappeared from the scene entirely.

I was delighted however that many of the succah decorations that have hung in my succah for more than fifty years in Chicago, Miami Beach, Monsey and Jerusalem were, like me, around and still in serviceable condition. Naturally, each of those decorations brings back a flood of memories-of cold and snowy Succot holidays in Chicago and Monsey, of boiling hot and dripping humid Succot in Miami Beach and of the joy of being able to sleep comfortably in my succah here in Jerusalem.

And as the years have gone by, there are the beloved ones who visit my current succah only in the form of spiritual ushpizzin, but whose presence are nevertheless very real to me. We have decorations from the whole world hanging in our succah and therefore every little bauble carries with it a memory of a place visited and an experience tucked away in the recesses of our mind.

Thus, putting my succah together is always an emotional experience for me, a time of memories and recollection. My grandchildren who have helped me to decorate the succah have done so fairly dispassionately since they enjoy the curios from far distant lands and places but they have no personal attachments to the objects and they do not awaken any memories for them. But, that is not the case for their old grandfather, for whom the succah decorations are, in a large measure, the story of his life.

The custom of decorating one's succah is an ancient but sporadic one. Usually agricultural decorations-dried corn and grains, honey in jars, dried fruits, etc.-were used when they were available. This was in keeping with the biblical theme of Succot as the harvest festival of the Jewish calendar year.

In many climes there was no possibility of such decorations. In my youth I remember that in my father's synagogue's succah and in the yeshiva's succah there were little or no decorations. And, they didn't have much color or any pizzazz attached to them. Over the past number of decades, as having a succah for one's self and family has become increasingly popular in the United States and here in Israel, the succah decoration industry has flourished.

Many succot now come with their own built in decorations on their panels and the Chinese are hard at work thinking up new types of decorations for our succot from year to year. Many tinsel decorations originally manufactured for non-Jewish holidays find

their ways into succot, especially here in Israel where certain sections of the population are completely unaware of the original reason and purpose of their manufacture. It is an interesting and sometimes even amusing world that we live in.

I find that the unseen guests-the ushpizin-are in many ways the stars of the Succot holiday. They have come to visit Jews in every clime and location on the globe. The Talmud itself has many illustrations of possible succot that were constructed in its time and in later times as well. There is a park in Israel called Neot Kedumim where all of these different types of succot are on view.

Though there are many variations possible, a succah basically is composed of a structure with a little more than two plus solid walls and a roof of natural agricultural materials that is partially open to the sky. In rainy climates there was always an attempt to protect the succah during the rain storm by ingenious methods.

The rain always plays havoc with the succah decorations and many of my mine have fallen victim to the rains in America. Even here in Israel, ten years ago we experienced a violent rain storm on Succot that pretty much soaked everything and everyone. The heavy rains have not as of yet arrived here in Israel this year but the early fall rains have happened and since Succot is "late" this year, there does exist a possibility of rain for the holiday.

Nevertheless, my succah decorations are proudly established in the succah and the holiness and anticipation of this holiday of family joy is felt anywhere you go in Jerusalem. May G-d's succah of happiness and peace envelop and protect all of us all year long. © 2011 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI BENJAMIN YUDIN

TorahWeb

Every yom tov has its own unique character. Regarding the holiday of Sukkos there appears to be a basic contradiction between two conflicting themes. On the one hand, the Maharil explains the reason that Sukkos comes following Yom Kippur is that if it was decreed that an individual or community go into golus-exile, as result of the judgment of Yom Kippur, they can serve this sentence by exiting their homes for a seven day period, and reside in a temporary abode, the sukkah. This teaching is found earlier in the medrash Yalkut Shimoni, (Vayikra 653), in the name of Rebbe Eliezer bar Marnus, that if the Jewish nation were judged to be exiled, their going into their Sukkos, is considered On High as if they went to Bavel.

Moreover, this concept of uprooting oneself and moving into a temporary dwelling as found in halacha. The Talmud (Sukkah 8b) teaches that if one lives in a

kosher sukkah all year long, they cannot fulfill their mitzvah of sukkah by remaining in that sukkah, but must leave their permanent sukkah and like all Israel, experience the phenomena of relocation and enter another sukkah. This is codified in Orach Chaim (636:2). It is not sufficient that one resides in a kosher sukkah; one has to experience literally the move.

Yet, paradoxically, we find that Sukkos is defined as a most happy, joyous festive holiday. The Yalkut (654) notes that the charge to be in a state of simcha-happiness is found three times in the torah regarding the yom tov of Sukkos. Interestingly, regarding Pesach there is no biblical directive for simcha, and the holiday of Shavuos has simcha incorporated but once. The Zohar (Parshas Emor) ascribes some of the special simcha of Sukkos, to the seven ushpizin-privileged guests who join us daily in the sukkah. What is perhaps most fascinating is the exception to the rule that exists regarding the mitzvah of sukkah, namely that mitztaer-one who is uncomfortable and pained by fulfilling the mitzvah of residing in the sukkah-is exempt thereof. Regarding the observance of Jewish law we are generally governed by (Avos 5:26) lefum tzarah agrah, i.e. the reward is in proportion to the difficulty and exertion. If one does not enjoy eating matzah, or when we had, and please G-d in the future will have, the korban Pesach, their lack of enjoyment is not an exemption. The Yerushalmi relates how some rabbis endured a headache from Pesach to Shavuos as a result of drinking wine and not grape juice for the mitzvah of daled kosos. Sitting in the sukkah is radically different. If one is troubled by extreme weather conditions under which they would not remain even in their own home, or if they are troubled by unpleasant odors or disturbing insects, the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 640:4) rules that they are exempt from the sukkah [except the first night that even under those conditions one is to eat a kezayis in the sukkah].

At first glance there appears to be a startling inconsistency whereby exile and leaving one's comfortable home usually denotes hardships and sufferings bereft of the conveniences of home. Yet in the sukkah we are mandated to merge these divergent motifs.

The Torah (Vayikra 23:43) teaches that we are to reside in Sukkos "L'ma'an yeid'uh doroseichem ki ba'sukkos hoshafiti es Bnai Yisroel b'hotzi'ih osam mei'Eretz Mitzrayim-so that your generations will know that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in booths when I took them from the land of Egypt". Rav Yosef Salant zt"l, in his Bear Yosef, notes that we are told to relive and reenact, not simply remember the manner in which Hashem provided for us in our forty year trek through the dessert. The anei haKovod-

Clouds of Glory provided millions of travelers in the dessert with perfect climate control-air conditioning by day to protect them from the beating sun, and heat by night to dispel the chill. Moreover, these clouds

worked overtime at night by providing fresh laundering and dry cleaning for their clothes. They were provided miraculously with manna from heaven satisfying their individual tastes and diets, and fresh drinking water was supplied in abundance despite their location being far from any oasis. In their travels and exile from Egypt to the land of Israel, Hashem provided them with all the comforts of home. It is for this reason, explains the Bear Yosef, that if one is mitztaer-uncomfortable in the sukkah, that they are exempt thereof as this would negate the positive characteristic of sukkah of reliving His abundant kindnesses. This understanding of our stay in the desert, after which our mitzvas sukkah is modeled, puts to rest the sukkah paradox: through the mitzvah of sukkah we reenact our desert experience, which included being in a form of galus but also included Hashem's infinite kindness in making that galus very comfortable. © 2011 Rabbi B. Yudin & The TorahWeb Foundation, Inc.

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

Philosophy is an intimidating subject. Most of us would rather deal with concrete intellectual and emotional issues, something into which we can get our teeth-and our hearts. And yet, during the Festival of Sukkoth, amidst our most joyous celebrations, our Sages instituted the reading of King Solomon's Koheleth (Ecclesiastes), an often brooding work that agonizes over the philosophical problems of existence. What is the connection between this work and the transcendent joy of Sukkoth? What message does it carry that could not have been delivered in a more conventional form?

Let us take a brief look into this penetrating book. In its recurring theme, Solomon declares, "All is emptiness," the pleasures of the world are all without value. More than any other Jewish king in history, Solomon enjoyed virtually limitless honor, wealth and luxury. He had vast properties, numerous slaves and one thousand wives and concubines. His palaces were adorned with the most exquisite works of art, and his tables were laden with the finest foods and wines. No material pleasures were denied to him, and no one was in a better position to assess their true value. Having sampled everything that the material world had to offer, he was able to step back and take an honest look at it. And he concluded that all was emptiness. The only reality was to fear and obey Hashem.

So what are we meant to derive from this philosophical evaluation? How can we relate to concepts of extreme unreality when we've just taken out a mortgage on a house and the car needs a new brake job?

Let us look a little further into the words of King Solomon. "For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under Heaven, a time to be born, a

time to die, a time to plant, a time to uproot, a time to weep, a time to laugh, a time to grieve, a time to dance." These lines, so clearly profound and meaningful, have been quoted and paraphrased and borrowed for poems and songs the world over. But what do they really mean? What insight into the meaning of time is immortalized in King Solomon's enigmatic words?

Time, if we stop to think about it, is an inexorable current which sweeps us along through the passages of life. It is the framework in which we live, the receptacle of our experiences. We create terms and classifications- years, days, hours, minutes, seconds-in a vain attempt to gain a modicum of control over time, but it remains uncontrollable. We feel its relentless flow through our very beings. There is no stop button, no pause button. The unstoppable tick of the clock controls our lives. But what is this thing called time? Is it merely the passive blank canvas on which we paint the stories of our lives? Or is it something of far deeper significance?

These are the questions King Solomon is addressing. "For everything there is a season." Time is more than a path upon which we tread. Time is Hashem's most amazing creation in the natural world. It is a dynamic force, the source of all life energies. The mystical sources point out that time is not defined by the artificial units we assign to it but by the different energies and emanations that infuse it. One particular block of time may be charged with the energies of planting, and that activity is therefore most suited to it. Another block may be charged with the energies of uprooting, and so forth. Each moment has its distinctive challenges and opportunities, and therefore, only by tapping into the correct energy source of each moment of time can we utilize it to its fullest and capture it.

"All is emptiness," King Solomon tells us. The only reality is that which can be contained and preserved in time. The accumulation of material possessions has no real value. It does not connect with the synergies of time. It is no better than a boulder by the riverside, left behind by the rampaging current. Only the way we live and the things we do penetrate to the core of time and are carried along with us through and beyond our lifetimes.

On the Festival of Sukkoth, when we begin the new year with a clean slate, King Solomon's profound message shines for us like a beacon in the dark. Throughout the year, we have been caught up in the mad rush of the daily grind, pummeled by the spinning hands of the clock. We have allowed ourselves to be subjected to the tyranny of time. But with our new insight into time, we can harness and control this relentless flow. If we can perceive the nature of time as it passes, if we do not plant in a time of uprooting nor weep in a time of laughing, we can spare ourselves the frustrations of futility and find serenity and peace of mind. Only then can we capture and preserve the

capsules of time for all eternity. © 2011 Rabbi Y. Cinter & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

In its formal structure, Sukkot most closely resembles Pesach. Both are seven days long, and both arrive on the 15th day of their respective months, exactly half a year apart. Yet, Pesach doesn't have a post-holiday gathering, while Sukkot has the 8th day, Shemini Atzeret, which is a distinct, separate festival. For the first time in a week, we stop "living" in the Sukkah and put away our Lulav and Etrog. So what is this "Eighth day holiday" really about?

The Targum says that the word "Atzeret" means "gathering." One major part of Sukkot is the necessity for the Jewish people to gather together as Jews. Shemini Atzeret is a festival that is dedicated to the Achdut (unity), of the Jews. Although other holidays may also fulfill this same purpose, Shemini Atzeret, a holiday with no distinct reason, is dedicated to the theme of unifying all Jews.

Especially in these modern times, the issue of "Who is a Jew" sometimes grows more important than "What is a Jew". Shemini Atzeret is a time where G-d doesn't want any Jews to become separated. He wants all Jews to be unified, no matter what their level of observance. I want one more day where all Jews can be unified as one. Asking for Teshuva on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is a great emotional strain. Building a Sukkah and preparing for the holidays can tire a person out physically. We may feel relieved when all the holidays are done with and we can return to our normal routines. Shemini Atzeret shows us that we should feel exactly the opposite. We should say, "Please, stay one day longer." Don't be so eager to leave! Let us have one more day where all Jews can stand side-by-side and celebrate in unity! © 2003 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

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'kadish"; 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 Mei'Eretz 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'nei hu ahsa Sukkos." (ArtScroll: "... and for his cattle, he made shelters.") The Sfas Emes notes the "sound-alikes" ("mi'knei hu" = "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. © 2011 Rabbi N.C. Leff & torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

I've always wondered why Sukkot falls just a few days after Yom Kippur. After all, the rabbis ask, we started living in booths in the desert after the exodus from Egypt.

Perhaps it is because Yom Kippur is a day when we find G-d by withdrawing from all forms of physicality-eating, drinking, cohabitation. Everything concerning life energy is prohibited. This is the one day when through abstaining, we try to reach great spiritual heights.

Sukkot falls on the heels of the Day of Atonement to teach that the real way to find spirituality is not by withdrawing from the world but rather by finding holiness in the physical world.

Thus during the Sukkot festival we live in the sukkah. In nature which G-d created. We lift the lulav and etrog and recite a blessing to G-d to declare that He can be found in every form of life.

In many other religious faiths one enters the world of the spirit by leaving the body. In Judaism one enters the world of the spirit by sanctifying the body.

A fitting story comes to mind. Berel was on his way from Pelz to Kelz. He had heard that in Kelz he could attain great spiritual heights. As he rested for the night, he left his shoes pointed in the direction he was walking only to have a trickster turn them around as he slept.

The next morning, Berel arose and started walking according to the way his shoes were pointed, in the same direction he had come from the day before. A deep sense of satisfaction came over him as he approached the "new" city, stream, house and family. Berel had found his spirituality not in the Heavens but in the very same physical place he had left.

Sukkot follows just days after Yom Kippur as a counterbalance to that solemn day. It reflects the sentiments of Rav Kook who once said, "There is nothing unholy, only the holy and the not yet holy."

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RABBI PINCHAS AVRUCH

Staying Focused

For most holidays, the Torah reading is the narration of the events the festival is commemorating. This past week's Yom Kippur reading detailed the procedures for the special service in the Bais HaMikdash (Holy Temple in Jerusalem). The Pesach reading recounts the Exodus from Egypt, and we read of the Revelation at Sinai on Shavuot. Succos, though, does not honor one particular event, so the reading comes from Parshas Emor, where all of the holy days are discussed in the middle of a narration of numerous facets of Divine service.

"On the fifteenth day of [Tishrei] is the festival of Succos, a seven day period for Hashem." (Vayikra/Leviticus 23:34). It is noteworthy that the Torah calls this holiday "Succos" (plural of succah) but has not, at this point, explained why a succah is germane to the celebration. It is not until the end of the narrative, even after the discussion of the mitzvah of the Four Species, in verses 42 and 43, that it is related, "You shall dwell in booths ("succos") for a seven day period...So that your generations will know that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in booths when I took them out of the land of Egypt." If our observance of dwelling in booths is the focus of the festival, these closing verses are out of place; they should be at the opening.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986; Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New

York City; the leading Halachic/Jewish legal decisor and foremost leader of Torah Jewry of his time) explains that the concept of "succah" - living in a transient, temporary abode - is not novel to the Jew. Essential to our faith is the precept that our daily existence in this world is given to us as our chance to perfect our spiritual selves and develop a G-d consciousness by utilizing mitzvah opportunities and studying Torah. Furthermore, since the physical trappings of our existence in this world are given to us as aids to achieving our spiritual objectives, there should be no discomfort when we spend money or utilize assets for the fulfillment of mitzvos or giving of charity; this is ultimately why we were given these assets!

Therefore, concludes Rabbi Feinstein, the concept of "succos" is not new, as it is lived everyday, no matter where we find ourselves. The festival of Succos was given to us to help concretize and fortify this tenet in a practical, substantive way.

This understanding also offers a deeper insight as to why we are forbidden from residing in the succah when it is extremely uncomfortable, such as when it is raining or very cold. If the essence of the succah is to teach the perspective to be maintained through our daily lives - which includes the mindset that our assets should never be the cause for a sense of discomfort because they are all a temporary means to a greater end - then that lesson cannot be learned when the succah is physically uncomfortable.

The famed Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen Kagan of Radin; 1838-1933; author of basic works in Jewish law, philosophy and ethics and renowned for his saintly qualities) once welcomed a visitor into his home. The visitor was somewhat surprised to see the Spartan conditions in which this renowned leader of Torah Judaism lived, with only a simple wooden table and some benches furnishing the main room of the simple house. When asked what bothered him, the guest blurted out, "Where is your furniture?" Rabbi Kagan responded, "Where is yours?" The visitor answered, "I am only a guest here. I didn't bring any furniture." To which the Chofetz Chaim replied, "I, too, am only a guest in this world. My most prized possessions, my Torah learning and mitzvos, are waiting for me in my real home in the World to Come."

Our liturgy refers to the festival of Succos as "the time of our happiness". After the teshuva (return to G-d) of the month of Elul, the recognition of G-d as our Father and King on Rosh HaShanah and the spiritual cleansing of Yom Kippur, we now have seven days to enjoy and revel in our new relationship with our Father in Heaven. The blessings we asked for on the High Holy Days are not an end to themselves. The succah reminds us that we must not become distracted by the temporal; we must keep our focus on our ultimate objective of building the bond. © 2002 Rabbi P. Avruch & Project Genesis, Inc.