

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

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

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

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

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

when we briefly liberate ourselves from the sophisticated pleasures of the city and the processed artefacts of a technological age and recapture some of the innocence we had when we were young, when the world still had the radiance of wonder.

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

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

Most majestically of all, Sukkot is the festival of insecurity. It is the candid acknowledgment that there is no life without risk, yet we can face the future without fear when we know we are not alone. G-d is with us, in



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the rain that brings blessings to the earth, in the love that brought the universe and us into being, and in the resilience of spirit that allowed a small and vulnerable people to outlive the greatest empires the world has ever known. Sukkot reminds us that G-d's glory was present in the small, portable Tabernacle Moses and the Israelites built in the desert even more emphatically than in Solomon's Temple with all its grandeur. A Temple can be destroyed. But a sukkah, broken, can be rebuilt tomorrow. Security is not something we can achieve physically but it is something we can acquire mentally, psychologically, spiritually. All it needs is the courage and willingness to sit under the shadow of G-d's sheltering wings. ©2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd no human knows of [Moses'] burial place even to this day.” (Deut. 34:6) Amid the great joy of Shemini Atzeret-Sim?at Torah, emanating from the biblical commandment “and you shall thoroughly rejoice” (Deut. 16:15), a curious dialectic between celebration and solemnity nevertheless exists. This is palpable especially in Israel, when the dancing and festive readings from the end of Deuteronomy and beginning of Genesis are followed shortly thereafter by the recitation of the Yizkor memorial prayers.

Perhaps the duality of the day stems from the fact that we conclude Deuteronomy with the death of Moses, about whom the Bible testifies: “And there has not arisen a prophet again in Israel similar to Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” (Deut. 34:10). From the perspective of Moses' death, the fundamental joy of Sim?at Torah appears somewhat of an anomaly. How can a day on which we read of this great loss also serve as one of the most festive days of the Jewish calendar year?

I believe the answer is to be found in the verse, “and no human knows of [Moses'] burial place even to this day” (Deut. 34:6). Many explain correctly that this has prevented the creation of a Mosaic shrine and a cult of Moses worship. I would like to add to this an

additional understanding, based on the following vignette – which I heard from my mentor, Rabbi Moshe Besdin – that sheds profound light on the reason why the greatest of our prophets is denied a known gravesite.

A small town in Poland, with a limited number of Jewish families who were pious but ignorant of the holy texts, was in need of a rabbi. The parnass (community leader) was dispatched to the famous Volozhin Yeshiva to search for a candidate, but after being turned down by the most promising students, he became desperate. He finally approached a serious but other-worldly student with the bold request: “Come to be our town rabbi. We are a famous town: Rabbi Akiva, the Ramban and the Vilna Gaon are all buried in our community.” The student, adept at Talmud but ignorant of Jewish history, imagined a town of scholars and immediately left with the parnass.

After a few weeks it became clear that no-one in town possessed even rudimentary Torah knowledge. The devastated young rabbi asked the parnass to take him to the cemetery. “At least I can contemplate your former glory at the gravesites of Rabbi Akiva, the Ramban, and Vilna Gaon!”

“You didn't understand me,” responded the parnass. “In Volozhin, the students cited these great rabbis, and debated their legal arguments and discussions, as if they were walking among them. Rabbi Akiva argues, the Ramban decides, the Vilna Gaon rules. In your yeshiva, they are truly alive. In our town, no one has ever heard of what they wrote. In our town, they are dead and buried.”

When the Torah tells us that no one knows of the location of Moses' gravesite, it is because for the Jewish people, Moses never died. We publicly read and privately contemplate his teachings on a daily basis. The greatest proof of his continuing presence in our lives is the fact that we conclude his Divine revelation only to immediately begin to read his words once again as we start the biblical cycle anew.

Therefore, on Simhat Torah, the day on which we read of Moses' physical passing, we should wholeheartedly rejoice in the eternity of his teachings, emblemized by one of the signature songs of Simhat Torah: “Moshe emet, v'Torato emet!” – “Moses is truth, and his Torah is truth!”

We can similarly understand the seemingly incongruous tradition of reciting the memorial Yizkor prayers on festivals. In fact, the practice perfectly captures the essence of the day, as those precious moments quietly reflecting on our deceased loved ones offer us a unique opportunity to consider the ways in which their qualities and love continue to impact us. Indeed, there are few sources of more profound happiness than the realization that our loved ones live on through us, our children, and our descendants. ©2016 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The festival of Succot marks the culmination, so to speak, of the holy month of Tishrei. Though all of the festivals of the Jewish year retain a solemnity regarding their observance, the festival of Succot is marked as being a time of joy and celebration. The natural beauty of the holiday, as it is accompanied by the climate and agricultural bounty of the Land of Israel, enhances the celebration of the festival itself. The fact that the special commandments that distinguish this holiday from all others are of a natural and agricultural type reinforces within us the understanding of the viewpoint of the Torah towards the wonders of the natural world in which we live.

Even in the snow and cold of autumn in Eastern Europe (or in my childhood in Chicago) the holiday spoke to the Jewish people of the natural beauty of the Land of Israel and of the glories of G-d's world. While the pagan world worshiped nature itself, Judaism taught its adherents to worship the Creator of nature and its enabler. Plus, it was the view of nature and its awesome powers and enormous beauty that marked the dividing line between Judaism and the pagan world.

The other differences in behavior and outlook, values and our observances, stem from this original divergence as how we view the natural world that we inhabit. The festival of Succot serves to remind us as to this basic fault line in human thought and civilization.

Aside from the natural beauty of the world that the holiday emphasizes there is also a strong message of freedom that Succot represents. Succot symbolizes simple pleasures in life, without unnecessary luxuries and burdensome appurtenances. We are able to live, enjoy and experience life even under a flimsy roof and seemingly temporary quarters.

The Torah does not demand from us discomfort. If for various reasons it is uncomfortable and even painful to sit in the succah then we are freed from that obligation. However the Torah does demand from us a proper perspective as to the necessities of life. The succah is a temporary dwelling but the truth of the matter is that even our mansion-like home is also only a temporary dwelling for mortal human beings.

We are all travelers so to speak in this world and sometimes the demands of travel give us simple and temporary accommodations. The Torah wishes for our home to also be comfortable but one should never view it as being permanent. In spite of this serious thought, we are bidden to be happy and to rejoice in the present and in the blessings of life, family, the Land of Israel and our relationship to the Creator of all natural beauty and human satisfaction.

The only happiness that is lasting and meaningful, an inner happiness not caused by outside

stimuli or fleeting factors. The festival of Succot comes to help us experience this inner happiness and to negate within us any extraneous reliance on outside factors to create the happiness that we so long for and desire.

Succot also comes to teach us that somehow we could take a minimalistic view of life. Not everything is perfect and not everything is beautiful and there are many circumstances in life when we are forced to settle for less than we had hoped for. So, a succah is kosher even if it has barely more than two walls. We try to purchase and own the most beautiful blemish-free etrog possible. But any etrog, as long as it meets the minimum standards of halacha is also acceptable.

I remember as a child growing up in Chicago during World War II that there were only three etrogim in the synagogue on Succot to service the more than seven-hundred-fifty worshipers present. It took well over an hour and a half for everyone to mount the bimah and recite the blessing over the etrog. Needless to say, towards the end of the line the etrog was somewhat blemished after being handled by so many people over such a length of time. Nevertheless, the last person in line recited the blessing with fervor and commitment equal to those who had long before preceded him.

It is desirable to have a perfect etrog on which to make the blessing. But, it is not always possible and the reality of the matter is that we should always make do with what we have and not be prevented from serving G-d and man properly by the lack of perfection within others or ourselves. ©2016 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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

There is a common thread throughout the Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, Hoshanah Rabbah and Simchat Torah festivals - a thread that binds our people.

Note the four species we take as the Sukkot holiday begins. Each represents a different kind of Jew. But for Rabbi Jacob Reimer the most important part of the lulav and etrog is what he calls the - thingamejing, - or the agudah, the strip that binds the lulav together. Without that strip a lulav and its parts would separate, making it impossible to take as one as described in the Torah.

Hoshanah Rabbah adds a similar dimension. After all, of all the species the arava seems least important. It is the one without smell or taste, symbolic of the person without good deeds or knowledge. Still it is the arava and none of the others that play the central role on Hoshanah Rabbah, teaching that every

individual, even the seemingly less important play a crucial role in the fabric of our nation.

At the center of Shemini Atzeret is the prayer for geshem - rain. The mystics note that water by definition teaches the message of togetherness. There is no one molecule of water that can exist alone. Hence the Hebrew word for water is only in the plural - mayim.

All this reaches its crescendo on Simchat Torah, the holiday of ending and starting the Torah, much like a circle that knows no beginning or end. Thus, on Simchat Torah we dance in circles - the knowledgeable with the less knowledgeable, the committed with the less committed, the secularists with the religious, those on the political right with those on the left. On Simchat Torah were all on the same plane. All together.

It's an important concept especially in these days when our people and our land face such serious challenges. The only way we can overcome is if we remain as one with everyone playing a role.

Years back, at the first Soviet Jewry conference in Brussels, a young Argentinean spoke of how lonely he felt as a Jew in Buenos Aires. In those days, the sixties, the fascists ruled Argentina; Hitler's picture could be seen everywhere. The young man went on to say that at the conference he began learning the Hebrew language. He learned that the smallest letter was the yud, or the pintele yid. But, he continued, if one writes a second yud near the first it spells G-d's name. Two Jews together reflect the unity of G-d, and no matter how small each may be, together they can overcome everything.

That's what this young man felt at that conference - a sense of unity which made him believe that our people would prevail. And it's that sense of unity that we desperately need during these times. © 2008 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**T**he words of Koheles the son of Dovid” (Koheles 1:1). Although Sh'lomo HaMelech wrote three of the Biblical books, only two of them, Koheles and Mishlay, are introduced by mentioning that he was the son of Dovid; Shir HaShirim does not. It can be suggested that this is because Shir HaShirim is an expression of Sh'lomo's love for G-d, and by extension the relationship between G-d and His chosen people, while the others are Sh'lomo sharing some of his extreme wisdom with us. Being that Sh'lomo attributed G-d offering him anything he wanted to the righteousness of his father, Dovid (see M'lachim I 3:5-7 and Divray HaYamin II 1:7-9), when he shares

the wisdom he chose to receive with us, he includes his father's name in the attribution. Nevertheless, the Midrash (Koheles Rabbah 1:1 and Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:9) says that all three, including Shir HaShirim, were the result of the extreme wisdom that G-d bestowed upon Sh'lomo.

Earlier in the Midrash, a parable is given to help us read between the lines of the conversation between G-d and Sh'lomo: A king offered a beloved advisor anything he wanted. The advisor thought to himself, “if I ask for silver, gold or precious stones, he will give them to me. [If I ask for fancy or royal] clothes, he will give them to me. Rather, I will ask for his daughter (in marriage), and then everything will be given to me for his daughter's sake.” So too, when G-d appeared to Sh'lomo in Giv'on in a night dream and said to him “request what I should give to you,” Sh'lomo thought to himself, “if I ask for silver and gold and precious stones, He will give them to me. Rather, I will ask for wisdom, whereby everything is included.” G-d responded, “you asked for wisdom and you did not ask for wealth or honor or the life of your enemies (i.e. that they should die), therefore wisdom and knowledge is given to you, and through it, wealth and possessions and honor I will also give you.”

There are several questions that can be asked on this Midrash, one of which is asked by Rav Yitzchok Sorotzkin, sh'lita (Rinas Yitzchok, Koheles 1:1). How could G-d have responded that because Sh'lomo didn't ask for mundane things he will get what he asked for, if the reason he (and the advisor in the parable) didn't ask for those things directly is because asking for wisdom (or the king's daughter) is a better way of getting it, and getting more of it, than just asking for riches directly? It isn't presented as if Sh'lomo asked for wisdom instead of wealth, but that he asked for wisdom because it included wealth!

To answer this, Rav Sorotzkin references Rambam's explanation of the blessings promised in this world to those who follow the Torah (Hilchos T'shuva 9:1), that they are not given as a reward, but to enable the person who chooses to do the right thing to continue to do so without being distracted by anything. Being blessed with wealth means that time and effort that would have otherwise been spent making a living can now be devoted to continued spiritual growth. Being healthy means sickness will not inhibit this growth. Getting back to Sh'lomo, he didn't consider asking for wealth for wealth's sake, but in order to be able to devote his time and energy to increasing his wisdom, which is what he really wanted. However, the wording of the Midrash implies otherwise, as the reason given for the advisor asking to marry the king's daughter, and for Sh'lomo asking for wisdom, is because they include the wealth that they considered asking for. If the intent of the Midrash is what Rav Sorotzkin suggests, we would need to find a way to

explain its wording, or why not actually asking for wealth directly is enough, even if it was originally considered.

Other issues with this Midrash that should be addressed include the fact that the things Sh'lomo considered asking for (silver, gold and precious stones) do not exactly match what G-d seems impressed with Sh'lomo not actually asking for (wealth, honor and the life of your enemies). Is silver, gold and gems not the same as wealth? Additionally, the verses (M'lachim I 3:11 and Divray Hayamim II 1:11) also mention G-d being impressed with Sh'lomo not asking for long life; why does the Midrash omit this? Finally, G-d said that besides wisdom, He would give Sh'lomo wealth too (M'lachim I 3:13 and Divray Hayamim II 1:12); if wealth is automatically included with wisdom (and, based on Rav Sorotzkin's explanation, necessary in order to attain it), why does G-d have to specifically mention that besides giving Sh'lomo wisdom, He will also give him wealth?

Eitz Yosef (on Koheles Rabbah and Shir HaShirim Rabbah), likely because of the question Rav Sorotzkin poses, understands G-d's words as a rhetorical question; "did you ask only for wisdom but not wealth?" And since G-d knew that Sh'lomo really wanted wealth (which is why he asked for wisdom), He gave it to him. Although this explains how G-d could imply Sh'lomo didn't really want wealth (as it never was implied), and would also explain why G-d specifically mentions that Sh'lomo will also receive wealth, in other ways it makes matters worse. Aside from Sh'lomo's request now being a more mundane one (as a means of getting physical wealth), the rhetorical question G-d was asking must then also have included honor and the death of his enemies ("and you didn't want those too?"), yet only wealth is mentioned (besides wisdom) as part of G-d's gift to Sh'lomo.

It would therefore seem that, as Rav Sorotzkin suggested, what Sh'lomo really wanted was wisdom, and for the right reasons (not because being wise would allow him to become rich). When the Midrash says Sh'lomo considered asking for silver, gold and precious gems, it was because he knew that, under normal circumstances, being wealthy was a prerequisite for attaining wisdom, as otherwise too much time and effort must be spent on financial matters. (Asking for silver or gold or precious gems would have just been a more specific means of becoming wealthy.) Other things would also be needed, such as not having to deal with any enemies, either internal and external. But if he were to ask G-d for one thing and one thing only, the first thing he considered asking for was not having to worry about financial matters, which is the thought process the Midrash shares with us. Realizing that that would not be enough to guarantee wisdom, rather than asking for any of the factors necessary to attain wisdom, Sh'lomo decided to

ask directly for the wisdom itself.

G-d's response was that since he didn't ask for any of the factors usually needed to attain wisdom -- which included not only the wealth that Sh'lomo originally considered asking for, but being respected enough by others to preclude having any self-esteem issues, as well as not having any enemies to distract his focus -- those things weren't what Sh'lomo really wanted. He only wanted what they could bring -- wisdom. [Long life is also usually a factor, as wisdom is gained over time, year by year, even day by day, so G-d mentioned it as one of the factors Sh'lomo could have asked for. The Midrash, though, which already listed things that are necessary for wisdom before living a long time can bring that real wisdom, did not need to.]

Since Sh'lomo was granted this wisdom directly, without having to also receive the stages (wealth, lack of enemies, respect and long life) usually needed to attain such wisdom, none but one of them were mentioned as also being given to him. But despite not needing wealth to attain this wisdom, G-d gave it to Sh'lomo anyway, in order to help him accomplish what his wisdom dictated should be done. It was therefore mentioned separately as also being given to him.

There is a similar Midrash (P'sikta Rabbasi 14:7), which is quoted by Midrash Tanchuma (Chukas 6) and Yalkut Shimoni (M'lachim 173), and the wording of this Midrash is more explicit that Sh'lomo chose to ask for wisdom directly, bypassing requesting any of the factors usually needed to attain wisdom. There, the request by the advisor (called "one who is loved by the king") also matches this idea better, to the extent that, at least the way it is quoted in Midrash Tanchuma, afterwards the king says he was hoping the request would be to marry his daughter. Putting this back into the Midrash discussed above, the advisor was saying that the king will give me whatever I ask for, so rather than asking for just one thing, I'll ask for something that encompasses everything, similar to the way Sh'lomo asked for something that encompasses everything (even if Sh'lomo wasn't really interested in the factors needed for wisdom except for their value in attaining wisdom). And just as the king was really hoping that his trusted and beloved advisor would ask to marry his daughter, G-d wanted Sh'lomo to ask for the wisdom that would help him to lead the nation properly, including leaving us his legacy of Koheles, Shir HaShirim and Mishlay. ©2016 Rabbi D. Kramer

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

A Hybrid Etrog

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

The Etrog is a very delicate fruit. In order to strengthen it so that it can last a longer time, people created Hybrid Etrogim or they mixed two types of breeds together, in this case the Etrog and the

bitter orange, to create a stronger and long lasting fruit. Our sages in general forbade this "Etrog Murkav" for the following reasons:

1. The fruit is not authentic if it is a Hybrid.
2. Even if it is not hybrid it is still a combination of two fruits.
3. Even if we except the reasoning that there is enough of Etrog in the mix to make it kosher, in an Etrog that is exactly the minimum requirement, this second fruit would minimize the required amount needed for a kosher Etrog.
4. The very essence of the pure Etrog is minimized because of the additional fruit.
5. There are situations that the actual making of a Hybrid fruit would be prohibited therefore creating a situation that The Mitzva of Etrog would be accomplished by transgression.

Those sages who permit a hybrid Etrog offer the following explanations:

1. The Torah never specifically uses the term Etrog but rather the words "A fruit that is beautiful" (Pri Etz Hadar). Thus they claim a "Etrog Murkav" is also beautiful.
2. The Etrog combined by the two fruits looks exactly like an Etrog.
3. The addition of the additional fruit does not serve to annul the actual authentic Etrog.
4. The hybrid Etrog does not apply to doing a Mitzva even if it is a prohibition with regard to sacrifices.

The question of the hybrid Etrog is indeed complicated and is an interesting subject to delve into during the holiday of Succot. As well, one can find an exhaustive analysis on the subject in the Encyclopedia Talmudit. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

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 Hashoavevah. In the times of the Bais HaMikdash, a water libation accompanied the customary offerings. Simchas Bais Hashoavevah, 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 Hashoavevo 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. ©2013 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

TorahWeb

The celebration of Sukkos is a culmination of several cycles that occur every year. It is the last of the Shalosh Regalim, and Hashem now rests His Divine Presence on us completing the process of Yetzias Mitzrayim and kabbolas haTorah. Sukkos is also referred to in the Torah as the Chag Ha'asif -- the Harvest Festival -- thereby completing the agricultural year that had begun during the previous planting season. We also conclude the month of Tishrei, with its spiritual highs of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, by celebrating Sukkos.

It appears that the agricultural aspect of Sukkos is merely physical in nature, and yet when analyzed more carefully there is a spiritual dimension even to the Harvest Festival. This celebration is closely linked to the post Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur aspect of Sukkos. The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva perek 9) elaborates on the relationship between blessing and success in this world and our ultimate reward for mitzvah observance. True reward for performance of mitzvos cannot take place in this world; the benefits of mitzvah observance are spiritual and thus are only appropriate in the spiritual setting of the next world. If so, why does the Torah elaborate upon physical things such as bountiful harvests as a reward for mitzvah performance? The Rambam explains that the promises are not as a reward but rather a mechanism to further mitzvah observance. We cannot serve Hashem properly without the physical blessings bestowed on us. These blessings are only significant as they enable us to continue in our performance of mitzvos.

Based on this Rambam, we can understand an otherwise strange tefillah recited by the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur. After experiencing the most intense spiritual encounter with Hashem, as he leaves the Kodosh Hakodoshim, the Kohen Gadol offers a fervent prayer. We would have expected this prayer to be spiritual in nature, and yet he prays for seemingly very materialistic blessings. Requests for bountiful crops and economic prosperity seem out of touch with the spiritual dimension of the day. However, if we understand the role of physical blessing as the enabler for future spiritual success, this prayer fits perfectly into the tone of the day.

The celebration of Sukkos as the Harvest Festival is not just about physical produce. By marking the bountiful harvest on the heels of the Yomin Noraim we are confirming our belief as to why Hashem grants us these seemingly materialistic blessings: our harvest

is only meaningful if it furthers the spiritual goals attained during the weeks preceding Sukkos.

Today, most of us are not directly involved in the world of agriculture and it is difficult for us to relate to the notion of a Harvest Festival. Yet, the message of the role of physical bounty in the service of the spiritual is as true today as it was for our forefathers. As we celebrate Sukkos and express our thanks to Hashem for our bountiful physical "harvest," let us focus on its true worth as a way of enabling us to attain the spiritual "harvest" of Torah and mitzvos. With this mindset, the celebration of Sukkos is truly fitting as the culmination of the Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur experience. ©2014 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky & The TorahWeb Foundation, Inc.

MICHA BERGER

Aspaqlaria

We sometimes find that the Torah, instead of spelling the halachah out, uses a more poetic— if less direct—phrasing. One example is in the mitzvah to take an esrog. Instead of just calling it an "esrog", we are told to take a "p'ri eitz hadar", a fruit of a tree that is superior.

From a legal perspective, something is lost in this wording. We need to rely on Torah sheBa'al Peh to know that the pasuk refers to an esrog in particular. The description, though, can tell us something of the why. More is conveyed on the level of aggadah, instead of writing out the halachic detail.

The gemara (Succah 35a) explains, "'P'ri eitz hadar'—that its fruit tastes like the tree." Aggadah makes a distinction between an "eitz oseh p'ri", a tree that makes fruit, and when the two words are juxtaposed to make "eitz p'ri" or "p'ri eitz". In the latter case, it refers to either a tree or a fruit, respectively, where the fruit and the tree share the same taste.

A famous medrash (Breishis Rabba 5:9) comments on the language of the creation of trees. Hashem orders the earth on the third day to produce "eitz p'ri oseh p'ri", fruit trees that bring forth fruit, yet the land actually produces only "eitz oseh p'ri". Between the commandment and the fulfillment, something is lost. Instead of the norm being that the wood of the tree would taste like the fruit, this is now the exception. Somehow, the earth "disobeyed".

What does this medrash mean? Does the earth have free will, that it can choose to disobey G-d? Rav A.Y. Kook explains:

"At the inception of creation it was intended that the tree have the same taste as the fruit. All the supportive actions that sustain any general worthwhile spiritual goal should by right be experienced in the soul with the same feeling of elation and delight as the goal itself is experienced when we envision it. But earthly existence, the instability of life, the weariness of the spirit when confined in a corporate frame brought it

about that only the fruition of the final step, which embodies the primary ideal, is experienced in its pleasure and splendor. The trees that bear the fruit, with all their necessity for the growth of the fruit have, however, become coarse matter and have lost their taste. This is the failing of the "earth" because of which it was cursed when Adam was also cursed for his sin.

"But every defect is destined to be mended. Thus we are assured that the day will come when creation will return to its original state, when the taste of the tree will be the same as the taste of the fruit. The "earth" will repent of its sin, and the way of the practical life will no longer obstruct the delight of the ideal, which is sustained by appropriate intermediate steps on its way toward realization, and will stimulate its emergence from potentiality to actuality." (Orot HaTeshuva 6:7, Translation by B. Z. Bokser)

To R. Kook, this enigmatic medrash defines the nature of kidushah. In the metaphor of this medrash, "fruit" refers to the goal, and the "tree" is the means. In the ideal world, the tree would share the taste of the fruit, that is to say, the means for achieving a spiritual goal would generate the same excitement as the goal does. The soul doesn't feel the same spiritual high because the earth, the physical world, separated itself from the soul. The "new earth and new heavens" (Yeshiah 65:15) [a reference to RSRH's concept of meaning of the number eight developed in chapter 3. - mi] of the messianic age will come when this rift is healed.

Returning to esrog, it by saying "p'ri eitz", the Torah is telling us that the esrog is chosen in part because it exemplifies this ideal. It represents the underlying unity of secular and sacred.

However, the gemara continues, this does not uniquely identify the esrog! Don't pepper plants also taste like peppers? Interestingly, the gemara elsewhere (Succah 32b) ascribes the same property to hadasim. After proving this point, the gemara looks to the next word, hadar, to provide more stringent criteria.

Rav, after some clarification, indicates that the word should be read as though it were "hadir", the stable. Just as a stable has large livestock and small, so to an esrog tree bears both large fruit and small. This describes the esrog, which continues growing on the tree from one season to the next. At any time, there are young fruit as well as larger ones that have been growing from previous seasons. Rav Avohu presents the same idea slightly differently. He reads the word as "ha-dar", that which lives, a fruit that lives on the tree from one year to the next.

"R. Yochanan haSandlar says: Any congregation which is for the sake of heaven will end up being permanent." (Avos 4:14) "Any debate which is for the sake of heaven will end up being permanent." (Avos 5:16) The key to permanence is in using the day-to-day in service of the sacred. By using means toward

their intended ends.

The last opinion offered is Ben Azai's. He finds in "hadar" a reference to the Greek "hador", water. (Cf. the English "hydraulic", "hydroponics", etc...) The esrog requires far more water than other trees. "Water is never anything but Torah". The way in which one learns how to properly unify the secular and the sacred is the Torah. The entire concept of a halachic lifestyle is to bring sanctity to our daily activities.

This provides two approaches to the concept of hadar. To Rav and Rav Avohu, the esrog is more of a p'ri eitz than most because it shares more properties with the thing a p'ri eitz represents. Hadar means that esrog is a superior metaphor. To Ben Azai, what is important is not merely the concept, what is hadar is that it carries an implied imperative—that one should act to heal this flaw.

Rav Kook describes the relationship between chol and kodesh as a consequence of the connection between the means and the purpose. Chol, the physical world, exists to be the means for achieving kidushah. When we looked at tum'ah and taharah, we spoke about freeing the ruach from the influence of the nefesh. But being free is not enough. Freedom only has value if we use it to seek some purpose. The ultimate purpose is the spiritual, the drives of the neshamah.
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YITZ WEISS

Divine Embrace

One of the themes of Sukkot is to recognize that G-d is our protector. We go out of our permanent homes into a temporary dwelling and expose ourselves to the elements. In so doing we recall that G-d was our guardian when we left Egypt into the desert and remains our protector today.

The minimum requirement for a kosher sukkah is not four walls, but two walls and a tefach (a handbreadth). If we were to construct a sukkah based on the minimum, we would really be exposed to the elements! Two walls and a bit don't seem to offer much protection! How are we to feel secure?

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l compares the sukkah measurements to an arm: two "walls" - i.e. from the shoulder to the elbow, and from the elbow to the wrist, and a tefach - the hand. Rav Auerbach says that sitting in the sukkah one is literally in the embrace of G-d!

May this year be one where we see the protection of G-d on a daily basis and the coming of Moshiach! Have a great yom tov! *This dvar torah was told by Rabbi Aaron Cohen in Congregation Tifereth Israel, Passaic, New Jersey*

