

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd you shall rejoice on your holiday” (Devarim 16:14), the holiday of Succos (16:13). “For Hashem, your G-d has blessed you with all of your produce and with all that you have accomplished, and you shall be only happy” (16:15). It is clear that one of the reasons to be happy on Succos is because it occurs “when you gather [the product of] your work from the field” (Shemos 23:16). But what if you had a bad year? What happened when there was a drought or if locusts had eaten most of the crop and the farmer gathered little, if any, produce? How was he supposed to rejoice then?

Yes, I know that there are other reasons to be happy on Succos. We are thrilled (and relieved) that our sins have been forgiven. We are confident that despite the administering angels from the other 70 nations insisting that we be wiped off the face of the earth, G-d has defended us and spoiled their plans. And we celebrate our unique relationship with G-d and His divine providence by living in the succah, whose roof symbolizes the clouds of glory that accompanied us through the 40-year journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. But a bad harvest is a bad harvest. And that was when we lived from year to year, when a bad harvest meant a rough year until the next (hopefully good) harvest. What if we had been saving for years, had built up a nice retirement fund, and it was wiped out almost overnight? Could we still be happy then?

The answer, it would seem, depends upon your perspective. Whom do we place our trust in more—the G-7 Finance Ministers, or the Source of all blessings? Building up a 401k plan, while the prudent thing to do, made it much more difficult to remember that G-d ultimately controls our financial future, and reassesses the situation every year. Should we hope (and pray) that the market recovers? Absolutely. But this wake-up call was just another reminder of Who is really in charge. “It is better to place trust in G-d than to place trust in noblemen” (Tehillim 118:9, said every day of

This issue of *Toras Aish* is dedicated  
in memory of  
**Erica Levit, a’h**  
May her memory be for a blessing

Succos in Hallel). Moving into the succah for a week can help us appreciate what G-d has given us, and looking up at the schach reminds us of our special relationship with our True Provider. By becoming closer to G-d, studying and keeping His Torah, we can be confident that He will protect us and provide for us—in the short term and the long term. And having that option is certainly something to be happy about. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

### Shabbat Forshpeis

**T**here 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

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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 YOCHANAN ZWEIG**

### **Moving Fast into the Garden**

**T**he Midrash relates that bringing together the "arba'ah minim"-four species on Succos, represents the notion that all of Bnei Yisroel are one and should be viewed as such regardless of their level of commitment to Judaism. The "esrog"-citron has both a taste and a fragrance, thus representing those amongst Bnei Yisroel who possess Torah knowledge and good deeds. The "lulav"-palmbranch, which lacks fragrance but has a taste contained in the dates produced by the palm tree, depicts those Jews who possess Torah knowledge but lack good deeds. The "hadas"-myrtle branch possesses a fragrance but lacks a taste, reflecting those Jews who practice good deeds but do not engage in the study of Torah. The "aravah"-willow branch has neither a taste nor a fragrance, representing those amongst Bnei Yisroel who have no Torah knowledge and do not engage in good deeds.

We do not use the dates produced by the palm in the performance of the mitzva, rather the branch of the tree, which is tasteless. Therefore, why is the lulav branch considered to have a taste?

Citing the Maharil, the Ramah teaches that we should begin building a Succah as soon as Yom Kippur concludes, thereby moving immediately from the fulfillment of one mitzva to the fulfillment of another. Why must we move immediately to the mitzva of Succah rather than charity, Torah study, or any other mitzva?

The Talmud derives the laws pertaining to the construct of the Succah from the clouds which arose from the Garden of Eden. What is the connection between the Garden of Eden and the Succah? The Talmud relates that when Bnei Yisroel received the Torah on Shavuot, they reached the level of Adam prior to the sin in the Garden of Eden. However, when they committed the sin of the Golden Calf, Bnei Yisroel returned to the level of Adam after he was banished from the Garden for having eaten from the Tree of Knowledge. On Yom Kippur Bnei Yisroel received atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf, and they should have gone into Eretz Yisroel, built the Beis Hamikdash, and once again attained that special closeness with Hashem. However, instead they committed the sin of the spies which resulted in the death of that entire generation.

Succos represents the time period when, after having received atonement on Yom Kippur, we enter the Garden of Eden, i.e. the Succah. This is the reason why the construct and decor of the Succah, as well as the four species which we are commanded to take in it are made to resemble a garden. Immediately after Yom Kippur we are preoccupied with building the Succah, displaying our desire to attain this elevated level of closeness with Hashem by joining him in the Garden of Eden.

The Midrash teaches that one of the characteristics of the Garden of Eden was that the bark of the fruit trees tasted of the fruit. Taking the branch of the palm tree to represent the taste of the dates is reflective of the notion that we are recreating our existence in the Garden of Eden. This is the reason for the custom to bless the lulav in a Succah. The lulav in the Garden of Eden has the required symbolism.  
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#### **MACHON ZOMET**

### **Shabbat B'Shabbato**

*by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira-Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan*

**Q**uestion: The Torah gives the reason for the mitzva of Succah, as opposed to most other mitzvot: "... so that your later generations will know that I had Bnei Yisrael dwell in Succot when I took them out of the land of Egypt" [Vayikra 23:43]. But the specific details of the reason lead to an obvious question: The Exodus from Egypt took place on the fifteenth of Nissan, why then have we been commanded to occupy a Succah in Tishrei?

Answer: The Gaon of Vilna discusses this question and his solution is truly brilliant. The succot in which we live are not in memory of the Clouds of Glory which gave us shade when we left Egypt but as a symbol of other clouds which appeared later. At the time of the Exodus, we were accompanied by a pillar of cloud which protected us from serpents and scorpions, flattened the path in front of us, and guarded the nation "so that they would not be harmed from the heat and the sun." However, this miraculous cloud left us on the seventeenth of Tammuz, when we sinned with the Golden Calf. Then Moshe climbed Mount Sinai once again and prayed to G-d for forty days and forty nights, asking for forgiveness, staying there until the day before the first day of the month of Elul. On the next day he was commanded to carve out two new stone tablets and climb the mountain a third time for forty days and nights, until Yom Kippur. On that day we were completely forgiven, and we received the second set of tablets, suitable for people who had repented.

But the original pillar of cloud did not return, just as the revelation of the Shechina to which we had become accustomed did not return. In order to receive these precious gifts again, we were commanded to construct the Tabernacle. This would be the instrument which would allow the return of the former status, "And I will dwell in their midst" [Shemot 25:8]. On the day after Yom Kippur, on the eleventh of Tishrei, Moshe was told, "Speak to Bnei Yisrael, and let them bring a contribution for me, from every man whose heart tells him to contribute" [25:2]. The passage continues, "And they brought gifts to him one morning and another morning" [36:3]. This took place on two days: The first was the twelfth of Tishrei and the second was the thirteenth. The next day, the fourteenth of Tishrei, Moshe saw that the people were donating many things, and he had an announcement made in the camp: "Let no man or woman perform any more work for the holy contributions; and the people did not bring any more." [36:6]. Immediately afterwards, on the fifteenth of Tishrei, the wise artisans in Yisrael began to work on the materials for the Tabernacle. On that day, the Clouds of Glory returned. And that is why? according to the Gaon? we have been commanded to sit in a Succah beginning with that date.

But this leaves us with a question of why the verse explicitly links the mitzva of Succah to the redemption from Egypt and does not note the fact that it is connected to events that took place later on. Evidently this can be explained as follows: The Exodus from Egypt? rising up from the depths of forty-nine levels of impurity? includes every crisis along the way related to approaching G-d and all of the accompanying processes of repentance. Thus, the main significance of the appearance of the Shechina is related to the repentance for the great sin of the Golden Calf. And the joy of Succot is the joy of those who have repented and

not of people who have never sinned. This happiness brings us back to the important time when the people were forged into a single nation. It is a time when we were penitents and not perfectly righteous.

In looking at our calendar, we can see that it can be characterized by a startling duality. There are two "first" months, half a year apart, Tishrei and Nissan. Tishrei is the new year for Gentile kings, while Nissan is the new year for Jewish kings.

There are two significant days that describe special events in the development of fruits, also separated by half a year: the fifteenth of Shevat is the new year in terms of Maaser, and fifteenth of Av is the date when the fruit becomes ripe and can then be brought to the Temple as Bikurim, the first fruit. These two dates represent opposites of each other. One of the days symbolizes the very earliest beginning of the fruit, which has begun to form during the time of winter hibernation, while the other is a celebration of the full ripening, bringing joy and justifying the labor which was performed.

In a similar way, the fifteenth of Tishrei complements the fifteenth of Nissan. When we left Egypt we were unripe, taking our very first steps towards the revelation of the Shechina. Succot, when we have been commanded for all generations to live in a Succah, reminding us of how we lived in the desert, symbolizes the moment that we repented, when we became full partners in the holy labor of constructing a Tabernacle for G-d. This is when the great process of the Exodus from Egypt was finally completed.

#### **RABBI LABEL LAM**

### **Dvar Torah**

I merited a unique peak behind the scenes a few years back that helped to concretize an old idea that I had been carrying around for some time. It was one of those rare snowy winters in Jerusalem. A remarkable eighteen inches fell in one day, and the most beautiful city was ever more elegant dressed in white.

Early the next morning was a feast for photographers. A friend of mine pointed out something I may have otherwise missed. The wet snow weighed down the large leaves of the palm trees, and there it was in the center, like a finger pointing to the heavens was a single LULOV.

Click! I took a picture and gained an insight. The letters of the word LULOV can be deconstructed into two words, LO- To Him (HASHEM) LEV-is Heart. This is the essence of what we hope to accomplish by taking the four species on Sukkos to dedicate, to point our hearts heavenward.

Each of the species, our sages tell us, represents a different organ of human anatomy. The Esrog resembles the heart, the Lulov- the spine, the Hadassim the eyes and the Aravos the lips. Not only is the year a new year but so are we. Therefore after

begging for life on Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur we step out onto the soil of a brand new year with more than symbols picked from the garden of our inspiration, with a new heart filled with fresh feelings of devotion, and new spine focusing our newly found direction and with a clean eyes and pure lips with which to see and express ourselves.

The Mishne in Tractate Sukkah tells us that a Lulov that is stolen or dry is no good. A Lulov has to be yours as prescribed by the verse, "And you should take for yourself on the first day..." If it is somebody else's devotion that we are emulating and it is not our own then it is lacking in authenticity. If it is dry, a mere leftover from last year, a frozen institutionalized remnant or a souvenir of better years it doesn't qualify.

The Mishne continues to inform us that if is from a tree that was worshipped or a city that indulged in idolatry it is also invalid. If our new found inspiration emanates from a decrepit source, that also disqualifies it.

If the head is chopped off or the leaves removed it is invalidated. If the leaves are spread apart, a little scattered that OK but Rabbi Yehuda says that we should bind them from above. If we are acting without our heads altogether impulsive or compulsive or in a way that we are divorced from our source, those are sufficient grounds to disqualify but if our problem is a lack of focus that's normal and passable but Rabbi Yehuda says, "Get it together!" We can learn an awful lot from its laws and its natural pose, but Most of all we can learn to love from the LULOV. © 2004 Rabbi L. Lam & Project Genesis, Inc.

#### **RABBI YAAKOV MENKEN**

### **Legacy**

**P**hilosophy 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. © 2006 Rabbi Y. Menken & torah.org

#### RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

### Shabbat Shalom

**W**hy does Sukkot follow Yom Kippur? Why do we trade in the white kittel of holy prayer for a hammer and nails and start building a temporary booth? Four days ago we were on the level of angels, and now we've joined the carpenter's union!

A fascinating comment by Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach on the nature of the Ne'illah prayer on Yom Kippur may provide an answer to our question.

Everyone has a Carlebach story. During his lifetime, Shlomo Carlebach was certainly a larger-than-life figure, and although controversial in some corners because of his anti-establishment posture, whoever heard him sing a song or tell a tale will never forget the experience. With his death, his reputation as one of the unique figures of our generation has only grown. Of all his talents, perhaps his major strength lay in the fact that he was able to reach all kinds of Jews—religious, secular, feminists, even anti-religious, softly cutting through the lofty notions and getting to the essence. Probably he single-handedly brought back more Jews than any other figure of our time. It's not commonly known that before picking up the guitar his reputation as a gifted Talmudic scholar was known throughout the yeshiva world. But Reb Shlomo, our holy soul brother, chose not to remain within the protective sanctity of the Bet Midrash; instead he brought his haunting melodies and bitter-sweet stories to the people. Very much a reincarnation of the original Hassidic rabbeim, he touched the common, forgotten and sometimes alienated Jew. And through his music he brought the loftiest message of our faith to the deepest recesses of the soul in furthest outposts of the world.

The climax of Yom Kippur, the holiest and most awesome day of the year, is the Ne'illah prayer, literally the 'locking of the gates.' With the waning of the sun, our last chance to get through those gates with repentance and purity are about to come to a close.

Will we make it, or won't we? The tension in the synagogue is palpable. The moment of truth is coming. There is so much at stake and so little time to do it in. We have to concentrate, focusing all our remaining strength on making those last moments count, on getting through the gates before they lock for good.

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach would often comment that it's such a pity that so many Jews focus all of their energy in not getting locked out, we should be just as concerned about getting 'locked in'!

What I believe he meant was that we dare not become too fixed into a system that blinds us from seeing the forest for the trees, we dare not become so insular and self-involved that we stop seeing what is right outside of our window. This danger of insularity can express itself in various ways. Nationalism, pride in one's own heritage, is undoubtedly an important tool for creating a society that works well together, a shared determination to put that vision into effect. But all too often the spirit of the law gets overlooked in the precise concern for the letter and the line between nationalism and chauvinism can turn legitimate Jewish pride into a militant devotion which includes contempt for other nations or religions. Once you're locked in to such an extent it may indeed be worse than being locked out.

One of the most striking examples of how such narrow-mindedness can threaten our spiritual existence, may be found in a Tosefta in the Babylonian Tractate Yoma [Ch. 1, Mishna 10]. Generally, the individual priests were chosen for the specific priestly duties of the holiest Day of Atonement by the lottery system. But the very first—and earliest—function of the day was decided by a race between the various interested priests up the ramp; whoever got there first was rewarded with the priestly duty. The Mishna and Tosefta record one such race up the ramp: "There was an incident involving two priests, running neck and neck. One of them tried to push the other out of the way; the one who was being out-distanced took a knife and struck his competitor in the heart. R. Zadok came and stood at the doorway of the great hall of the Temple Mount. The great and pious sages said to the assembly:

'Listen to me, my brothers of the house of Israel. The Torah says, If you find a dead body between two cities... the elders and the judges go out and measure [the distance of the nearest city to where the corpse was found, and they are required to bring a sacrifice, the eglah arufah [Deut. 21: 1-9]. Now let us go out and measure who has to bring the sacrifice, the leadership in the temple or the leadership in the courtyard.' The entire nation cried out in tears. And then the father [of the priest struck in the heart ] said..., My son is still breathing, so the knife is not yet ritually impure.' (The knife can therefore continue to be used....)"

A very strange episode. Not only have the priests forgotten the ethical purpose of peace which is the goal of the Temple ritual, but it would seem that the only matter of real concern—even to the father of the priest who was mortally wounded is not his son's life but is rather the ritual purity of the knife!

The story concludes: "Because of the sin of shedding blood, the Divine Spirit has been locked in, and the Holy Temple has been defiled." In the Tosefta, the Hebrew for the phrase 'locked in' is *ne'ulat*, recalling the *ne'illah* prayer on Yom Kippur. Therefore R. Shlomo's commentary regarding *ne'ilah*, how most of us are worried about being 'locked out' when we should be more worried about being 'locked in', could very well be based on this Tosefta...

Even if we didn't exactly get the message of being 'locked in,' on Yom Kippur, along comes Sukkot just four days later which literally unlocks our front door. For the next seven days we leave our locked homes, our predictable way of looking at the world, the sky, the stars, the permanent walls we live inside of, and experience a new relationship to nature and the world outside. The very ritual items that we're commanded to bless are part and parcel of nature itself; they require no transformation on our part. We do not turn a ram's horn into a musical sounding instrument, nor wheat into an edible food. The Four Species come straight from the fields. Indeed, the booth we sit in has specific laws regarding its structure: the only material we can use for a roof are varieties of vegetation, making for a natural, humble and most universal dwelling, and—although the material must be thick enough to cast more shade than sun, -- we must be able to look up and see the stars. Furthermore, when the temple still stood, seventy sacrifices were brought on Sukkot, corresponding to the seventy nations of the world. Judaism was anxious to each concern even for those different from ourselves, and took precautions lest we become so insular that we never see beyond, or outside of, ourselves. Perhaps the open spaces of the Sukkah help release Israel, as well as the Divine Spirit, from becoming locked into a hermetically sealed Sanctuary. © 1997 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

**RABBI ELIJAHU HOFFMANN**

## Bullish Outlook

**S**ukkos is a unique Yom Tov in so many ways, one of which is its *karbanos* (ritual offerings). While the number of rams and sheep sacrificed on each of Sukkos' seven days remained constant (2 rams, 14 sheep), the bulls were offered in varying quantities. Specifically, 13 bulls were sacrificed on day one, 12 on the second day, 11 on the third day, and so on. Over seven days, 70 bulls were sacrificed.

Chazal, our Sages of blessed memory, offer a fascinating insight into the "diminishing bulls." There are, according to the Talmud (Sukkah 55b), seventy

nations of the world. The seventy bulls correspond to those seventy nations, and it was in the merit of these bulls that the nations flourished and succeeded. Regarding this, the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Bamidbar 684) quotes the verse (Tehillim/Psalms 109:4), "In place of my love - they hated me." "Rabbi Yehuda said: How foolish the nations are! They have lost, yet they know not what they have lost. When the Holy Temple stood, the Altar [with its seventy bulls] would bring them forgiveness. Now - who will bring them forgiveness? (Sukkah *ibid.*)"

Seemingly, the seventy bulls were a gesture of (largely unappreciated) generosity offered by the Jews on behalf of the nations. Yet Chazal (see Rashi, Bamidbar 29:18) also note that although the quantity of sheep (symbolizing the Jews) remained constant, the bulls were offered in diminishing quantities, which is a sign of weakness and vulnerability. How can we reconcile these two seemingly opposite ideas?

Perhaps both concepts are necessary: We wish the nations much success and prosperity. At the same time, we are concerned that their success and prosperity not "go to their heads," leading them to arrogance, pride, and irreverence, which can often be the precursor to anti-semitism. Therefore, we "weaken their resolve" by offering the bulls in diminishing quantities. Now that we have no Temple, the unparalleled prosperity of earlier days is no longer with us, nor them. On the other hand, nothing is left now to weaken their resolve and their natural inclination to hate the Jew for being different. (Need more be said?)

If we dig a little deeper, we may wonder why it is that Sukkos, among all the Yamim Tovim, was chosen to offer this token sacrifice on behalf of the nations?

Rav Aaron Kotler zt"l (Mishnas Rav Aaron vol.3 p.61) writes that he heard the following story from the holy Chafetz Chaim zt"l: In the times of the Gaon of Vilna, there was a famous convert, known as the Ger Tzedek (righteous convert) of Vilna. He came from an aristocratic family, and risked his life to become a Jew. He lived as a Jew in hiding for many years. By chance, however, he was recognized, and was taken prisoner and subjected to brutal torture in an effort to have him renounce his Judaism. But it was all for nought; the Ger Tzedek of Vilna had become a pious and committed Jew, and no amount of torture could change that. He was sentenced to death. Before putting him to death, his detainers had second thoughts about the brutal torture to which they had subjected him. They asked for his forgiveness. Otherwise, they feared, he would take his revenge in the World to Come.

"Let me tell you something," he told them. "It is written (Tehillim/Psalms 117:1-2), 'Praise Hashem all the nations - praise Him, all the states! For His kindness has overwhelmed us!' This seems contradictory: Why should the nations praise Hashem,

if His kindness has overwhelmed us [i.e. the Jews]? (See Pesachim 118b which poses this question.) The answer, however, is simple. Right now, as things stand, it is impossible for me to forgive you for the barbaric and inhumane treatment you have given me. Yet worry not. Because after you kill me, my Jewish soul will ascend on High, and I will be so overwhelmed by the Almighty's kindness and love, that it will no longer be possible for me to bear a grudge against you. To the contrary, for every beating you gave me, I will experience infinite bliss and light in the World to Come!"

Rav Kotler explains: Sukkos is a period of extreme joy in the Jewish calendar. We sinned, we were judged, we were forgiven, and we've been given an invitation into the Almighty's private tent. In many ways, it must not have been easy for the Jews to offer sacrifices on behalf of the nations. These are the same nations that have persecuted, victimized, and exploited our nation for millennia. And now we are to beseech Hashem and offer sacrifices on their behalf? So Hashem says: First come into My tent. Sleep in My shelter. Let us rejoice together. And then, once you have come to feel My great love for you, you will be able to wholeheartedly do what needs to be done on their behalf, offering love in the place of hatred.

While there may be those who decry the aggression and militancy of our nation, the truth is obvious and self-evident. We are a peace loving nation. All we ask for - all we have ever asked for - is to be allowed exist as Jews, and serve Hashem in peace. In these difficult times, we beseech the Almighty that the moment may come that we may once again offer sacrifices on behalf of ourselves, and on behalf of the nations of the world; that we be so overwhelmed by His kindness, love, and goodness, that the bitterness and resentment in our hearts will cease to be recognizable. Ba'agalah u-vi'zman kariv - may it come speedily, in our days. © 2000 Rabbi E. Hoffmann & Project Genesis, Inc.

#### **AISHDAS SOCIETY**

### **Aspaqlaria**

by Rabbi Micha Berger

**W**e 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 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 enjoyment for the soul as the goal does. We don't get that "spiritual high" because the earth, the physical world, separated itself from the soul. The "new earth and new heavens" (Yeshiah 65:15) of the messianic age will come when this rift is healed.

Returning to esrog, 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. Esrog isn't just any "p'ri eitz", it's a superlative one.

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 breach the rift, so that every eitz is hadar, that sanctity is brought and felt in every aspect of our lives.

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### **RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

## **Wake Up & Smell the Esrog**

**T**here is something definitely very different about Yom Kippur. Even before the revered Kol Nidrei is chanted, a special supplication is recited. The community stands before the Almighty and asks permission to be allowed to pray together with the sinners. It may be quite difficult for those who come to synagogue day after day, week after week, month after month, to be deluged with an onslaught of those who seek a temporary asylum for three short days. Our sages knew the feeling. The first words of the Kol Nidrei entreat the righteous to stand together with the not-so-righteous and begin their prayers as one.

Yom Kippur is not the only holiday that invokes a societal acceptance of wrongdoers. All Jews are symbolically accepted if not heralded during the holiday of Sukkos. On Sukkos, there is a mitzvah to shake four distinct species. The four species must be taken together as one, or the mitzvah is invalid. The four species have unique attributes. The lulav (palm) has taste but no smell, the hadas (myrtle) has smell but no taste. The esrog (citron) has both taste and smell, yet the arava (willow) has neither taste nor smell.

As children we were taught that taste represents Torah knowledge and a good smell represents good deeds. There are Jews, explains the Midrash that have both Torah knowledge and good deeds. There are those who are charitable and righteous but have no Torah. Then there are those who have Torah but unfortunately have no good deeds. And finally there are those who have neither Torah nor good deeds. They are all bound together as one. In this manner they all can support each other. But, why do the holidays of Yom Kippur and Sukkos herald unity and outreach more than any other Yom Tov?

My parents moved to the Five Towns of Long Island before the first sputnik was launched and before

I was born. At that time, the Five Towns, a current haven of kosher eateries, amenities and synagogues was a spiritual wasteland. My three sisters had a difficult time adjusting to the move from their small apartment in East New York to the vast open fields of suburbia. They had to cope with the spiritual aspects, too. My youngest sister, Shoshana, became best friends with Beth, a child who hardly knew what being Jewish meant. On her third Shabbos in Woodmere, my sister was out early on her way to the synagogue that my father had just established a few blocks away.

Beth stared at her friend who was dressed up for no apparent reason. "Where ya going, Shawnee?" she asked.

"To shul." My sister looked down at her frilly pink Shabbos dress and repeated, "I'm going to shul."

"Shul?" Beth repeated incredulously. "What's shul?"

"Shul?" asked Shoshana "What do you mean, 'what's shul?' Shul is shul!"

The conversation bounced back and forth for a minute, until Beth's father came out of the house dressed in overalls and carrying gardening tools. "Dad?" asked Beth. "What's shul?"

"Oh, Beth!" he exclaimed. "Shul is temple!"

My sister's eyes widened in uneasiness. "Temple?" she repeated incredulously, "what's temple?"

As we begin a new year, a strong message of brotherly love reaches out to us both in the liturgy of the synagogue and the liturgy of the harvest—the four species. Jews must realize that whether it is the reflectious times of Yom Kippur or the rejoicing of Sukkos, we are one people. There are saints and sinners among us. There are those who are filled with the delicious taste of Torah and the sweet fragrance of good deeds. And there are those of us who are as prosaic as a willow. Yet, both in trepidation and in jubilation we must join together as Jews. We must find each other. If we do not include the bland and tasteless willow, our observance is unacceptable.

On both Yom Kippur and Sukkos the esrog must look for the arava. It is a wonderful time to find someone missing either the smell, taste, or both and have him wake up and smell the sweet scent of the esrog. © 1996 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org



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