

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

The prayers recited during the recently concluded High Holidays include the desire/plea that "all of humanity (Jew and non-Jew alike) join together to fulfill Your will." In the Haftorah of the first day of Succos (Zecharya 14:16), we read that this request will be realized during the Messianic period; "And it will be that all who are left from all of the nations, who had come against Jerusalem (to wage war against it), and they will come up every year to bow before the King, the G-d of Hosts, and to celebrate the festival of Succos." Why is this holiday singled out as the one during which all the nations of the world will come to acknowledge G-d?

Most of the commentators explain that the war of Gog and Magog, the final war before Moshiach comes, will take place on Succos. Since it will be the wondrous miracles performed in this war that will cause all to recognize the One True G-d, it will be this same time every year that the nations return to pay homage to Him. Rashi, however, has a different approach. The Talmud (Avodah Zarah 3a) describes a conversation between the gentile nations and G-d, where they ask if they can start from scratch (and thus be worthy of the same future as the Nation of Israel). Eventually, G-d gives them one "easy" commandment to fulfill, to live in a Succah. It is because of this "mitzvah," given to the gentiles as their last opportunity to show that they deserved to be included in all of the Torah's commandments, that (according to Rashi) the other nations come to Jerusalem every year to "bow before G-d."

Upon a closer look, though, this approach would seem to be problematic. For one thing, this commandment can be fulfilled anyplace, not just in Jerusalem. Secondly, in the Talmud, the nations eventually leave the Succah, kicking it in disgust (thereby failing to be deemed worthy of the reward that awaits those who followed the Torah), while in Zecharya they return each and every year! More fundamentally, though, the context of the Talmudic section shows that

it will occur years *after* the passage in Zecharya will take place! How can Rashi explain the cause of the nations making a yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem to be an event that has not even occurred yet?

Here is a synopsis of the end of the conversation between G-d and the gentiles: The gentiles request a "do-over," that they be offered the Torah again, so that they can (now) fulfill it. G-d responds that it's really too late, as reward can only be given in the world to come to those that worked for it in this world. Nevertheless, "I have one easy commandment, namely Succah, go and fulfill it." The Talmud asks how G-d can offer such a thing, when a verse explicitly implies that mitzvos cannot be performed in the world to come- to which it answers that G-d does not use "excuses" to prove His point, so wanted to give them an opportunity to show whether or not they really would keep the commandment(s) if given the chance. Initially, each gentile goes and builds a Succah, but when G-d makes it extremely hot (and therefore uncomfortable in the Succah), they all leave it- kicking it on their way out. Even though one who is very uncomfortable is not obligated to stay in the Succah, by kicking it they showed that they never really wanted to fulfill it (see Maharal).

It is obvious, then, that this will occur when (normally) there would be no chance to garner reward for following G-d's word, i.e. after the resurrection of the dead. (An analysis of the other times that the Talmud refers to this concept of not being able to get reward for deeds done in the world to come confirms this.) Zecharya refers to the period just after Moshiach comes, before the resurrection of the dead (which is how the nations can be "punished" for not coming to Jerusalem during Succos). If the attempt at living in a Succah will take place *after* the years of traveling to Jerusalem on Succos, how can it be the reason why Succos was chosen for this required pilgrimage?

The Maharsha explains that G-d specifically chose the mitzvah of Succah because it is a temporary dwelling, hinting to them that they should have fulfilled their commandments in the "temporary dwelling" that is this world. The Maharal explains that it is unnatural for one to leave a permanent home to move into a temporary one, so it can only be done by those willing to go against their nature in order to serve G-d. By kicking the Succah, the nations showed that they were unwilling to go against their nature, and hence not fitting to fulfill the Torah. It is also possible that since the nations

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claimed that they really wanted to follow His word, G-d purposely used a mechanism that would prove that they never truly wanted to. This would be proven by giving them a commandment, and seeing how they reacted when the requirement was lifted. Rather than being disappointed at the lost opportunity, they showed disdain for the mitzvah, thereby showing their true distaste for it. Succah was just such a vehicle, whose obligation could be removed, exposing the true nature of the commanded.

Since G-d wanted to use the mitzvah of Succah to prove His point, He may have caused that this "conversation" occur on Succos (making it appropriate to give such a commandment). How? By having the nations come to Jerusalem on Succos every year since Moshiach came. And this will happen because the miraculous war of Gog and Magog, through which "the fear/awe of G-d will grip all of His creations," will occur on Succos. Since they will make the pilgrimage every year, it is during this pilgrimage of the first year after the resurrection of the dead that they will request a "do-over," at which time G-d will give them the opportunity to live in the Succah.

In essence, then, while the other commentators explain that the nations coming to Jerusalem for Succos is due to the timing of the event(s) that brought about their recognition of the One True G-d, Rashi is taking it a step further, and explaining why these event(s) were timed to occur on Succos.

May we merit seeing G-d's presence return to Jerusalem, and being protected by His Succas Shalom- His Succah of Peace. © 2004 Rabbi D. Kramer

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 Cong. Tifereth Israel, Passaic, NJ*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

One of the most picturesque and creative festivals of the year is the Festival of Sukkot - when the entire family is involved in building and decorating a special "nature home" which will be lived in for an entire week. But what are we actually celebrating and what is the true meaning of the symbol of the Sukkah? Is it the Sukkah of our desert wanderings, the temporary hut which the Israelites constructed in the desert when they wandered from place to place? If so, then the Sukkah becomes a reminder of all of the exiles of Israel throughout our 4,000 year history, and our thanksgiving to G-d is for the fact that we have survived despite the difficult climates - the persecution and pogroms - which threaten to overwhelm us. Or is the Sukkah meant to be reminiscent of the Divine "clouds of glory" which encompassed us in the desert with G-d's rays of splendor, the sanctuary which served as the forerunner of our Holy Temple in Jerusalem. In the Grace after Meals during the Sukkot festival we pray that, "the Merciful One restore for us the fallen tabernacle of David", which would certainly imply that the Sukkah symbolizes the Holy Temple. The Talmud (B.T. Sukkot 11) brings a difference of opinion between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Eliezer as to which of these options is the true significance of our celebration. I would like to attempt to analyze which I believe to be the true meaning and why.

The major Biblical description of the festivals is to be found in Chapter 23 of the Book of Leviticus. There are two textual curiosities which need to be examined. The three festivals which were always considered to be our national festivals, and which also Biblically appear as the "desert" festivals, are Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot; commemorating when we left

Egypt, when we received the Torah at Sinai and when we lived in desert booths. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are more universal in nature and not at all related to the desert sojourn. It seems strange that in the Biblical exposition of the Hebrew calendar Pesach and Shavuot are explained, after which comes Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, and only at the conclusion of the description comes Sukkot.

Now of course one can argue that this is the way the months fall out on the calendar year! However, that too is strange. After all, the Israelites left Egypt for the desert; presumably they built their booths immediately after the Festival of Pesach. Would it not have been more logical for the order to be Pesach, Sukkot, Shavuot, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur?

Secondly, the Festival of Sukkot is broken up into two parts. Initially the Torah tells us: "and the Lord spoke to Moses saying, '... on the fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Festival of Sukkot, seven days for G-d... these are the Festivals of the Lord which you shall call holy congregations....'" (Leviticus 23:33-38). It would seem that these last words conclude the Biblical description of the festivals and the Hebrew calendar. But then, in the very next verse, the Torah comes back again to Sukkot, as if for the first time: "but on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you gather in the crop of the land, you shall celebrate G-d's festival for a seven day period.... You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a citron tree, the branches of date palms, twigs of a plaited tree (myrtle) and willows of brooks; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your G-d for a seven day period.....You shall dwell in booths for a seven day period..... so that your generations will know that I caused the people of Israel to dwell in booths when I took them from the Land of Egypt. I am the Lord your G-d" (ibid. Leviticus 23:39-44). Why the repetition? And if the Bible now wishes to tell us about the four species which we are to wave in all directions in thanksgiving to G-d for his agricultural bounty, why was this verse not linked to the previous discussion of the Sukkot booths? And why repeat the booths again this second time?

I have heard it said in the name of the Vilna Gaon that this repetition of Sukkot with the commandment concerning the four species is introducing an entirely new aspect of the Sukkot festival: the celebration of our entering into the Land of Israel! Indeed, the great philosopher legalist Maimonides explains the great joy of the festival of Sukkot as expressing the transition of the Israelites from the arid desert to a place of trees and rivers, fruits and vegetables symbolized by the four species (Guide for the Perplexed, Part 3 Chapter 43). In fact this second Sukkot segment opens with the words "But on the fifteenth day of the seventh month when you gather the crop of the land (of Israel) you shall celebrate this festival to the Lord..."

Hence, there are two identities to the festival of Sukkot. On the one hand, it is a desert festival, alongside of Pesach and Shavuot, which celebrates our desert wanderings and survivals while living in flimsy booths. From that perspective, perhaps it ought to have found its place immediately after Pesach in terms of the calendar and certainly before the description of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur in the Biblical text. However, this second identity of Sukkot, the four species which represent our conquest and inhabitation of our homeland and signal the beginning of redemption, belongs after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur -the festivals of G-d's kingship over the world and his Divine Temple which is to be "a house of prayer for all the nations". This aspect of Sukkot turns the Sukkah into rays of Divine splendor and an expression of the Holy Temple.

So which Sukkot do we celebrate? Both at the very same time! But when we sit in the Sukkah, are we sitting in transitory booths representative of our wandering or rather in a Divine sanctuary protected by rays of G-d's glory? I think it depends on whether we are celebrating the festival in the Diaspora or in the Land of Israel.

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Sameach. © 2004
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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

There is a custom each evening of Sukkot, to invite special guests-ushpizin—into the Sukkah. Every evening the patriarchs, matriarchs and their families are welcomed.

Ushpizin sets the tone for the holiday of Sukkot. The Sukkah itself is built outdoors open to the public. And the four species-the lulav and etrog-represent all types of Jews. If any one of the species is missing, the mitzvah is invalid, teaching the critical importance of each and every person.

In a real sense, the ushpizin parallels the paragraph recited at the outset of the Passover Seder, wherein we invite guests to the seder table.

In Jewish history, there were towns that were especially hospitable; some were actually called ushpizin. My father was raised in Oswiecim which the Nazis later transformed into the notorious Auschwitz death camp. He once told me that the Jews referred to the town as Oshpitzim, a Polish corruption of the word ushpizin, in tribute to the well-known hospitality of the Jewish residents to travelers and wayfarers.

We follow this approach by affectionately referring to our synagogue as "The Bayit." As a bayit, a home is a place of love and welcome, so too does the very name of our synagogue convey our basic credo of endless love and welcome.

Not coincidentally the custom of ushpizin falls just days after the high holidays. Many Jews primarily

identify with their Judaism on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. And so, immediately after the holidays, we leave the synagogue and build the Sukkah. In a sense we're saying, even if one finds it difficult to come to the synagogue, the synagogue will come to you.

This invitation is meant for all Jews, even the most extreme non-believer even an apikorus, one who rejects fundamental principles of faith. Note, each of the words in the text presented by Rabbi Elazar: "Know what to answer a heretic-Da ma sh-tashiv l'apikorus." (Avot 2:14)

Da, to know, in the biblical sense means to love. In other words, react to the apikorus with love. Ma, of course, means what. When dealing with an apikorus, one ought to listen closely and respectfully to his or her questions and learn from them. Sh as a prefix asks us to pause. Tashiv can be related to the word teshuvah, which from a mystical perspective means to encourage the wrongdoer to return to the inner good that he or she possesses. The prefix Lamed of l'apikorus denotes that one is to have a direct I-thou encounter with the person who has gone astray.

Of course, wisdom and Torah knowledge are crucial in order to respond to an apikorus. Still, the approach should be one of endless love, using persuasive rather than coercive arguments. To those who have challenged a nonjudgmental approach to an apikorus, suggesting that it leads to situation wherein there is neither tzaddik or rasha, I would argue that with regard to one's relationship to God, God must be that judge.

And that should be our approach as we recite the ushpizin. To embrace our people regardless of affiliation, commitment or background; to welcome them in with endless and infinite love. © 2000 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

The Olah sacrifices of the holiday of Succot described in the Torah portion of Pinchas are very different from the sacrifices of the other holidays. The number of rams and sheep brought on Succot are double (two rams instead of one on other holidays and fourteen sheep instead of seven on the other holidays), and the number of oxen is also different. The doubling of the rams and sheep can be explained by one of two reasons: (1) It is related to the excess joy of the "time of our happiness"—this is the harvest celebration, the end of the agricultural season, and the Torah itself emphasizes the concept of "joy" three times (Vayikra 23:40, Devarim 16:14,15). (2) The double sacrifices are an expression of the dual character of the holiday. It is one of the holidays of the month of Tishrei ("On the fifteenth day of this seventh month" [Vayikra 23:34]) and at the same time one of the three agricultural holidays

of the year ("On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you gather the crops of the land" [23:39]).

However, with this background, the situation of the other type of animal brought for an Olah sacrifice, the ox, is unclear. The number of oxen decreases day by day, starting with thirteen on the first day of the holiday and reaching seven on the seventh day. On one hand, this is another example of a larger number of sacrifices than is typical of other holidays—on most holidays two oxen are brought, and on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Shemini Atzeret there is only one. On the other hand, why does the number steadily decrease on Succot?

As is well known, the sages noted the fact that the total number of oxen offered as sacrifices on Succot is seventy, and they explained that the oxen represent the other nations of the world (Succah 55b). The number seventy is also significant on its own, as a multiple of the number seven. On the other holidays, the only large number of sacrifices, over one or two, is either seven or fourteen. One possibility is that the decreasing number of oxen is an expression of decreasing happiness and joy. On one hand, even on the last day of the holiday it is important to have a large number of sacrifices. On the other hand, the passing days bring us further and further from the days of judgment and atonement, and also from the great joy of the first day ("And you shall take for you on the first day a beautiful fruit..." [Vayikra 23:40]). The joy about the past year is diluted by a feeling of worry and prayer about the coming year.

One additional idea may be noted. The number of oxen during the holiday is not special in itself, but it points towards a number of oxen that has symbolic significance—the last day, when seven are sacrificed. Thus, this may be a written source for the significance of the seventh day of the holiday, Hoshanah Rabba, which is linked by our sages to special ceremonies with the aravah branches. "Every day the Altar is circled one time, while reciting the verse, 'Please, G-d, help us, please, G-d, save us' [Tehillim 118:25]... On that day, the Altar is circled seven times." [Mishna Succah 4:5]. Thus, there is an inverse relationship between the decrease in sacrifices and the increase in prayer, and the two processes come together on the seventh day. This is a day of holiness related to the number seven: seven oxen and seven circuits around the Altar.

Succah & Eretz Yisrael: Two that are One and the Same by Rabbi Sha'ar Yeshuv Cohen, Chief Rabbi of Haifa and Member of the Council of the Chief Rabbinate

The sages have written, "'G-d is my light' [Tehillim 27:1] -- on Rosh Hashanah—'and my salvation' [ibid] -- on Yom Kippur—'for He will hide me in His Succah' [27:5] -- this refers to Succot". However, this commentary leaves us puzzled: Why does the verse tell us that "He will hide me in His Succah on a bad day?" It is true that the Succah was established in

memory of the clouds of glory that protected Bnei Yisrael in the desert, but after they entered Eretz Yisrael it became the Succah of the harvest holiday, a Succah of peace, every man under his own vine and under his own fig tree.

In addition, others have taken note of other nearby verses in the same chapter: "If an army camps at my position... If a war on me begins... And now I will raise my head over my enemies..." These verses imply a war by Yisrael and a victory over its enemies in Eretz Yisrael.

The Succah of the clouds of glory can be compared to Eretz Yisrael, about which we pray that it be surrounded by clouds which will protect it and its inhabitants. The land of Yisrael is the home of G-d, and at its center, at the heights of the Temple Mount and the Temple itself, lies the "hall" where we will "rise up to see" and where we will "visit in His hall" not only in days of peace but also "on a bad day." When the House is in danger, we will struggle for it even if those who camp around it are enemies who want to destroy it, and we will have no fear in our hearts.

Succot and Eretz Yisrael are two elements that are the same. One refers to the individual Succah of every Jew in his own home, while the other is the Succah of the community of Yisrael in its national home, Eretz Yisrael. The Vilna Gaon is quoted as taking note of a remarkable parallel. Succah and Eretz Yisrael are "the only two mitzvot that are not performed just with the hands, feet, or mouth, but rather a person's entire body enters into them, and they encircle his entire body." One who makes Aliyah to the land and settles in it is fulfilling a mitzva that is equivalent to all the other mitzvot. Anybody who enters a Succah and sits down in it is surrounded from all sides by the Succah, which protects him and provides him cover.

Another point is made in the name of Chassidic masters. "Just as one enters Eretz Yisrael wearing his boots and he observes a mitzva wherever he goes within the land, the same is true about Succah—the mitzva can be observed even wearing boots." In Eretz Yisrael and in a Succah, we gather together under the protecting shade of the Almighty, as in the poetic prayer that we recite in Ne'ila, near the end of Yom Kippur. "Let the shadow of His hand hide us under the wings of the Shechina... Let us have strength." Being protected by the Divine Shechina imparts to Yisrael a spirit of power and courage. A nation of faith does not hide behind walls of concrete and fences of stone, rather it believes in the G-d of Hosts of Yisrael and goes out to wage war. "As long as Yisrael look upwards and dedicate their hearts to their father in heaven" [Rosh Hashanah 29a], they are strong and they triumph.

Let us hope and pray that we will see the fulfillment of the verse, "G-d will give strength to His nation, He will bless His nation with peace" [Tehillim 29:11].

THE SALANT FOUNDATION

Around the Shabbos Table

by Rabbi Zvi Miller

Before his demise, Moshe ascended Mount Nebo, in order for HaShem to show him a view of the entire land of Israel. Amongst the views of Eretz Yisrael that he saw, the Torah (Devarim 34:3) states: "[and he saw] the valley of Jericho, city of date palms".

The Ramban explains that the valley of Jericho was a very deep valley, and therefore it was not visible from the top of the mountain. Rather, HaShem showed it to Moshe miraculously.

Although a view from a high position enables one to see further than a view from the ground—in this case—it served no advantage. Therefore, the following question arises: if HaShem miraculously showed him the valley of Jericho—why was it necessary for Moshe to ascend Mount Nebo?

An important principle of the Torah is that HaShem prefers to send us His help through natural means, rather than to help us through open miracles. Therefore, even though the view from Mount Nebo would not enable him to see the valley of Jericho, nevertheless, at least if Moshe ascended the mountain it helped give the appearance that he was seeing the valley through natural causes.

Our Sages of Mussar explain this concept and call it 'limiting the miracle' in order to hide the hand of HaShem. Hence, just as HaShem, minimized the miracle by instructing Moshe to go through the motions of natural causes, i.e., climbing the mountain in order to enhance his vantage point (even though the elevation did not give him a view of the deep valley), so too, a person should endeavor to employ some small natural causes in order to minimize the miracles that HaShem performs for him or her.

We understand from here, that HaShem hides His loving kindness and deliverance through the veil of nature. Therefore, we engage in natural causes, not because we believe that success comes from our own powers, but rather to minimize open miracles. Yet we must recognize the hidden love of HaShem that begets our success.

Implement: Reflect on one way of how HaShem sent His love to you today through a hidden miracle. [Based on Ohr HaShaz of Rav Simcha Zissel]

RABBI YAAKOV MENKEN

Project Genesis

“You shall dwell in Sukkos for seven days; every member of Israel shall dwell in Sukkos. In order that you know, for all generations, that I

placed the Children of Israel to dwell in Sukkos, when I took them out of the Land of Egypt; I am HaShem your G-d." [23:32-33]

In what "Sukkos," or booths, did G-d place the Children of Israel? Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki) quotes from the Talmud: this refers to the Clouds of Glory, which surrounded and protected the Jewish nation during their forty years in the desert.

The holiday of Sukkos reminds us that we are not self-reliant. This is the time of year when people pack up and move inside, and (in agricultural communities) celebrate their good harvest -- like Thanksgiving in the United States. At exactly this time, G-d tells us that we must move out of our homes, and live underneath an all-natural, unfinished roof that doesn't even fully block the sun. Sukkos is a great equalizer -- whether rich or poor, we are all living under the same incomplete roof of "schach."

Instead of celebrating our good fortune, or worrying about a bad crop, we celebrate our unique relationship with HaShem and the protection which He gives us. Like the Jews in the desert, surrounded by the Clouds of Glory, we declare that it is not our houses, our own resources, which sustain us.

While we were sitting in his Sukkah, Rabbi Moshe Silberberg pointed out the following: when the sun is shining, and everything is bright, then we look up -- and it doesn't seem as if there is too much schach. It is there, but we do not recognize it so much. But at night, when things are dark -- that's when you look up, and you really see the schach.

In the best of times, and even more so in the worst, may we always merit to recognize G-d's protection! © 1999 Rabbi Y. Menken & www.torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Just Desserts

The Talmud in Tractate Avodah Zarah talks about the future. It details for us a scenario that will occur after the final redemption, when the G-d of the Jews and His Torah are known and accepted by all of mankind. The entire world will see the great reward meted to the small nation that endured an incessant exile while following the Torah scrupulously. Then the idol-worshippers from other nations will line up before G-d and complain, "what about us?" Had we been given the Torah we, too, would surely have kept it! Why are you only rewarding the Jewish people?" The Talmud tells us that G-d makes a deal. "All right," He tells them. "I'll give you one easy mitzvah. If you observe it correctly, fine. However, if you do not, then your complaints are meaningless.

The Talmud tells us He will give them the mitzvah of Sukkah. G-d will then take out the sun in all its glory and the protection of the Sukkah will be no match for its rays. These idol-worshippers, predicts the

Talmud, will kick the walls of the Sukkah and flee in disgust.

There are many mitzvos in the Torah. 613 to be exact. And there are quite a number of difficult ones. Some are conducive to despair and disheartenment without a broiling sun. Why, then, was the mitzvah of Sukkah chosen to be the cause celebri that differentiates our commitment to that of an idolator?

Rabbi Paysach Krohn, in his first book of the Magid Series tells the story of a Reb Avraham who was about to enter a restaurant one late spring afternoon. Upon entering, he noticed a familiar vagrant Jew, known to all as Berel the beggar, meandering outside.

Reb Berel, rumor had it, was a formidable Torah scholar back in the old country, but had his life shattered physically and emotionally by Nazi atrocities. He was a recluse, no one knew exactly where or how he lived: but he bothered no one, and not too many people bothered with him.

Reb Avraham asked the loner to join him for a meal. He was about to make a business trip up to Binghamton and figured that he might as well prepare for the trip with more than a hot meal—he would begin it with a good deed.

Reb Berel gladly accepted the offer; however, when it came time to order, he asked for nothing more than two baked apples and a hot tea. Reb Avraham's prodding could do nothing to increase the poor man's order. "All I need are two baked apples and a steaming tea," he insisted.

Reb Avraham's trip to Binghamton was uneventful until the rain and the darkness began to fall almost simultaneously. As if dancing in step, the darker it got, the heavier the deluge fell. All Reb Avraham remembered was the skidding that took him over the divider and into oncoming traffic on Route 17 in Harriman, New York. He came to shortly after two tow trucks had pulled his wrecked car from a ditch and lifted him to safety. Refusing hospitalization, he was driven to a nearby motel that was owned by the Friedmans, a Jewish couple who were readying the place for the summer migrations.

Mr. Friedman saw the battered Reb Avraham and quickly prepared a comfortable room for him. His wife quickly prepared a little something for him to eat. She brought it out to a shocked and bewildered Reb Avraham. On her serving tray were two baked apples and a glass of steaming tea.

When the Jews left Egypt, they had nothing to look at in the vast desert but faith. They built simple huts, almost in declaration: "Hashem we will do ours, we are sure You will do yours." And those simple huts, those Sukkos, protected them from the heat, the cold, the wind, and the unknown. Hashem tells the prophet Jeremiah to tell his folk, "I remember the kindness of your youth as you followed Me in an unsowed desert." (Jeremiah 2:2)

Perhaps when the final redemption arrives, it will again be the simple Sukkah that will stand as the protectorate and advocate of the People who stood for 2,000 years in the face of idolators, who invited the Jews to join them... or die. So, when we enter the Sukkah this year, let us remember that it is only a small Sukkah stop on a long journey home. And when we arrive there, the Sukkah will be there once again to greet us as it was more than 3,300 years ago in the Sinai Desert. After all, it's nice to be served at the end of a 2,000-year-long journey with just desserts. © 1997 by Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

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Aspaqlaria

by Micha Berger

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 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 BENNY ELON

Yeshvat Beit Orot

Jerusalem and Mt. of Olives stand at the center of the haftarah (public reading from the Prophets) that we read on Sukkot. The passage, from the book of Zechariah, chapter 14, tells us that in the future, woe will be to those nations of the world who do not arrive in Jerusalem to celebrate the holiday of Sukkot, and a great plague will befall those who fought against

Jerusalem. The holiday of Sukkot, on which are brought 70 sacrifices on behalf of the 70 nations of the world, will be the time when all the nations and the entire world will finally appreciate the place of the Nation of Israel and that of Jerusalem.

A special focus in this haftarah is placed on the Mt. of Olives: "Then shall the L-rd go out and fight against those nations... And his feet shall stand that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split along its middle by a very great valley from east to west. Half of the mountain shall be removed towards the north, and half of it - towards the south."

The description of the Mt. of Olives as east of Jerusalem is very significant. East of Jerusalem was always very important - the Geonim used to arrive from there, and the Mt. of Olives was always a place where Jews would stand and look out onto the remnants of the Holy Temple when they weren't allowed to enter the city itself. Here, atop this mountain, was where David prayed while running away from King Saul. On Hoshana Rabba (the seventh day of Sukkot) a special, important, well-known, and holy Hoshanot ceremony was held, in which Kohanim (priests) holding willow branches would walk around the mountain. There are Geonic reports of this ceremony, and Kabbalistic writings about what will happen in the Redemption process when this ceremony - the forerunner of today's twice-yearly massive Priestly Blessing at the Western Wall - is renewed.

In the politics of today, too, this year may well have critical implications for the future of Jerusalem and Mt. of Olives. This could be the year in which the nations of the world will attempt to determine the fate of the Jerusalem, and the Arabs will likely attempt in various ways - including terrorism - to separate us from the eastern half of Jerusalem and Mt. of Olives. They will make every effort that we should not come to visit the ancient Mt. of Olives cemetery, or Yeshivat Beit Orot, or Ir David (the City of David, just below Dung Gate and the southern entrance to the Western Wall). They will do their best that we should not live in this entire area, east of the Old City of Jerusalem, the area known as the City of David.

This could also be the year, too, in which maps will be drawn, and we will see whether the city is truly united - not only in declarations, of which we hear many from our politicians: "eternal capital, united forever, etc." - but also in practice. If you have a car, you should try to get out and take trips in the different parts of our capital, and you will see that great efforts are being made in truly making this city totally Jewish. We are working on this very hard - myself, and many others - not only in Beit Orot, and not only in the Shimon HaTzaddik neighborhood. Many many lands in Jerusalem and environs are owned by Jews and can be reclaimed.. These include a clear majority of the lands surrounding Jerusalem, including the Temple Mount -

from the Kidron, from Shimon HaTzaddik, the University (known as Tzurim Valley), the Valley of Yehoshaphat, the Valley of the King, the ancient and holy Jewish cemetery on Mt. of Olives, the City of David, the Ben Hinnom valley - all along the east half of Jerusalem.

Our presence must not only be under the ground, in the cemetery, but also above ground, with Jews walking there on Shabbatot inside the eruv, with schoolchildren on trips in their capital, walking along the green patches - all this is not only possible, but it must be done. This is what will determine the fate of Jerusalem, and will decide: Will the nations despair of dividing Jerusalem, while we determine facts on the ground to perpetuate its genuine unity? Or will we be like those who merely parrot declarations, but don't get up and do anything?

Unfortunately, there are those who do this - sitting in the Diaspora, every year they recite "Next Year in Jerusalem," in the full knowledge that next year they will be exactly where they are now.

This is the test that all of us will face this very year - there is nothing more urgent than this. The status of Jerusalem will be determined by us. I would be happy to meet each of you personally to walk around the various parts of Jerusalem and show how we are investing efforts, and how we must continue to do so. We are the Nation of Israel, returning to its Land and returning to its City, the Eternal City. May the words of the Prophet Zechariah - in the above chapter - be fulfilled: "On that day, He and His Name will be one."

Chag Same'ach, and we hope to see you - walking in Jerusalem! © 1999 by Rabbi B. Elon

