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Path

To Follow

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358

CELEBRATING IN THE JOY OF THE TORAH (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

On Simchat Torah it is customary in all Jewish communities to dance with Torah scrolls in synagogue, as everyone celebrates in the joy of the Torah. It seems difficult to understand the reason behind this joy, for why would people celebrate with the Torah, the majority of whose 613 mitzvot are prohibitions, while only a minority are positive mitzvot? The prohibitions include not murdering, not stealing, not coveting, and so on, while the positive mitzvot include observing Shabbat, making a sukkah, eating kosher, etc. What joy does the body have in all these prohibitions? From here we learn, however, about the great difference between Israel and the nations of the world. In fact we never see a non-Jew anywhere in the world taking his holy book and dancing with it. We have never seen a Muslim dancing with his holy book, nor a Christian dancing with his. Yet Jews, despite the fact that their entire Torah is composed of prohibitions and warnings, rejoice and dance with it. This is because of the teaching which states that there is no greater joy than to be saved from doubt. Where doubt exists, there is no joy, and conversely where doubt does not exist, we find joy. Since Jews are holy, they believe in all the words of the Torah and have no doubts about it, not even the smallest, which is the cause of their great joy. Even the nations of the world do not believe in their vanities, and even when they practice their own religion, we know and understand the doubts it entails, which is why it gives them no joy.

Thus the verse states, "Then all the peoples of the earth will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you, and they will fear you" (Devarim 28:10). In fact when Jews do G-d's will, their fear descends upon the nations of the world, for the soul of every Jew is a divine spark. Furthermore, the 248 positive and 368 negative mitzvot that the Holy One, blessed be He, gave to Israel correspond to the 248 limbs and 365 sinews of the body (Zohar I:170b). Every limb in a person tells him to perform a mitzvah, and every sinew constantly warns him not to sin (see Rashi, Makkot 23b). The Sages have also said that a fetus is taught the entire Torah while still in its mother's womb, which it does not leave until being told: "Be righteous; never be wicked" (Niddah 30b). This is because the Holy One,

blessed be He, has engraved special powers into the body of every Jew, enabling him to study Torah and fulfill mitzvot. He must therefore take an oath to that effect, which is not the case with non-Jews, as King David said: "He declares His words to Jacob, chukav [His statutes] and judgments to Israel" (Tehillim 147:19). The term chukav comes from a root which signifies engraving, meaning that from his formation in the womb, the Holy One, blessed be He, has engraved every Jew with the ability to study Torah and fulfill mitzvot, something that He has not done for any other nation.

When Jews hold a Torah scroll in their hands and dance with it, they are fulfilling the verse, "All my bones will say" (Tehillim 35:10), an idea that is developed by the Zohar (III:218b-219a). As long as Jews dance and rejoice with the holy Torah, the light in their souls becomes brighter and brighter, and their Torah endures in them. Furthermore, the Torah of Israel is unlike the holy books of the other nations; it was given by G-d on Mount Sinai, and what the Torah has forbidden are only things that people would not do upon reflection. All the words of the Torah constitute but good advice for people, in order for them to know how to conduct themselves in life, as it is said: "How good are the ways and paths of the Torah, since it is full of good counsel for man" (Zohar III:202a). The Sages have also said, "The mitzvot were given only in order that man might be refined by them" (Bereshith Rabba 44:1). Since the Torah's entire essence is but words of wisdom, and since its prohibitions exist only to distance people from foolish and vain pursuits, we rejoice in having it and we dance with it. However the religions of the world are not at all based on words of wisdom, and how much more do they not contain truth and holiness. These are found among the Jewish people, not among them.

The Midrash cites Rabbi Elazar HaKappar as saying, "One day I met a non-Jew while traveling, and throughout our journey he boasted that no god was as great as his. When I arrived at my destination, I said to him: 'Be like your god.' He replied, 'Are you cursing me?' I said, 'I'm not cursing you. You were glorifying your god during the entire trip, and now I wish you to be like him!'

" (Midrash Hallel). Since the Torah is engraved in the body of a Jew, we see extraordinary things. With G-d's help, I have been able to bring people back to Judaism. In France, several hundreds have taken this step, with men putting on tefillin, women observing the laws of family purity, and both men and women observing Shabbat. This is truly remarkable, for how can a man who has never worn tefillin put them on every day? Furthermore, how can a person who has never known what Shabbat is, nor observed it, suddenly close his store on Shabbat and go pray in synagogue? From where does he get such strength? The answer is that since the Holy One, blessed be He, has engraved this power in his body, it manifests itself by pushing him to improve.

Once when I was in New York, a Jew who had lost his sight paid me a visit, requesting a blessing to regain his sight. I asked him, "Do you put on tefillin?" When he said no, I told him: "Start wearing them from now on." He then asked me, "What do tefillin have to do with my eyes? Why are you telling me to put on tefillin to regain my sight?" I replied, "If you were to go to a doctor and he told you to take some medicine, would you ask him what connection the medicine has with your condition? No, you're going to believe what he says and you're going to trust him. Now just as you trust your doctor, you should also trust that all the mitzvot of the Torah heal a person of his ailments, as it is said: 'It will be health to your navel and marrow to your bones' [Mishlei 3:8]." This Jew left, started putting on tefillin, and his sight returned. He later returned to see me and said that when he put them on, he felt something that he had never felt before: He wanted to bring satisfaction to the Holy One, blessed be He, and to fulfill the mitzvah for its sake alone, not to regain his sight. I said to him, "By the merit of this faith, G-d has restored your sight." We find an allusion to this in the verse, "Bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as totafot between your eyes" (Devarim 6:8). I am certain that this Jew only attained such a tremendous degree of faith by the power that G-d engraved in him when he was created, before his birth. I am certain that it was this power that eventually led him to change his life.

CONCERNING THE PARSHA

The Seventy Oxen of Sukkot

See the difference between Israel and the nations of the world? When the nations of the world rejoice, they only think of themselves. Not so with Jews, for when they rejoice their heart goes out to the whole world in order to spread goodness upon everything.

On the first day of the festival, when the day begins, the daily burnt-offering is made, followed by the drink offerings (the libation of wine and the libation of water), in order for the entire world to be filled with abundance and blessing throughout the year. When these offerings have been completed, the mussaf [additional] offerings are brought and placed upon the altar for atonement. The mussaf offerings of one day are not the same as the mussaf offerings of another, for each day has its own particular mussaf offerings. The number of offerings in each mussaf diminishes from day to day, until on the seventh day just seven oxen are brought. In all, 70 oxen are brought as offerings during the entire festival. To what do these 70 oxen correspond? To the 70 nations of the world that emerged from Noah's children, and which are the ancestors of all the nations and languages of the present day. The Children of Israel make offerings for them, as an atonement and a prayer, so that Hashem looks upon the world with benevolence, so that one nation does not raise a sword against another, so that they may no longer learn war, and so that people may live in peace and harmony with one another. In regards to the verse, "In return for my love, they persecute me" (Tehillim 109:4), the Sages in the Midrash say: "The Children of Israel offer 70 oxen for the 70 nations. Israel said to the Holy One, blessed be He: 'Sovereign of the universe, I offer 70 oxen for the 70 nations, which is why they too should love me. Yet not only do they not love me, they hate me! In return for my love, they persecute me.'" – Sefer HaToda'ah

The Four Species

The four species of the lulav allude to the body of man. When a man takes them during the festival and recites the blessing over them with Hashem's Name, it is as if he were placing himself in His service with all his heart, all his bones, all that his eyes see, and all that his mouth says – all of it for Hashem. He is telling Hashem, "I am completely devoted to You alone. All my joy over the festival is solely for You." Every trace of sin that remains in a person who sinned with his body – by means of his physical senses and by means of his strength – everything is forgiven by the merit of this mitzvah, which he does through love and reverence for His Name. In the Midrash the Sages say, " 'All my bones shall say: Hashem, who is like You?' [Tehillim 35:10]. This verse was said in allusion to nothing else but the [four species]: The rib of the lulav resembles the spine of man, the myrtle resembles the eye, the willow resembles the mouth, and the etrog resembles the heart. David said: 'There are none among all the limbs greater than these, for they outweigh the whole body in importance.' This is, 'All my bones shall say' " (Vayikra Rabba 30:14).

The Sages have also said in this regard, "Why the etrog? It resembles the heart, to atone for the evil thoughts of the heart. Why the myrtle? It resembles the eye, to atone for what the eyes seek, as it is written: 'You shall not go after your heart and after your eyes' [Bamidbar 15:39]. Why the willow? It resembles the mouth, to atone for the words of the mouth. Why the palm branch? To tell us that just as the date palm has but a single heart, the Children of Israel have but a single heart for their Father in Heaven."

Great is the power of the mitzvah of the four species during the festival. Whoever takes them, recites the blessing over them, and prays with them, the seven Heavens will open before him and his prayer will reach the

Throne of Glory. This is alluded to in the seforim: The four species consists of one lulav, one etrog, three myrtle strands, and two willow strands, coming to seven in total and corresponding to the seven Heavens.

– Sefer HaToda'ah

To See What a Mitzvah is Like: The Sukkah in Tishri

It is written, "On the fifteenth day of the seven month is the festival of Sukkot" (Vayikra 23:34).

Although the Holy One, blessed be He, brought us out of Egypt during Nissan, a springtime month, He commanded us to make sukkot in Tishri, during the fall. This is because people usual build outdoor structures for shade during Nissan, and therefore building a sukkah at that time will prevent people from perceiving the mitzvah. Hence He commanded us to build a sukkah during the rainy season, when people usual leave their outdoor structures and live indoors. We, however, leave our homes and enter the sukkah. In this way, we recognize that we are carrying out the order of the King. – Tur, Orach Chaim

Free of All Sin

It is written, "On the fifteenth day of the seven month is the festival of Sukkot" (Vayikra 23:34).

In response to the question raised by the Tur, namely why we do not build sukkot in Nissan, the month that we left Egypt, the Chiddushei HaRim writes that from the passage, "In sukkot you shall dwell for seven days...in order that your generations may know" (Vayikra 23:42-43), we learn that in order to dwell in a sukkah, a person must understand, for it is written lema'an yed'u ("that they may know").

A person can reach the level of understanding when he is free of sin, for according to the Sages: "A person does not commit a sin unless a spirit of folly enters into him" (Sotah 3a), and folly is the opposite of understanding. Now in the month of Nissan, which is the middle of the year, a person is immersed in sin, so how can he reach the level of understanding needed to dwell in a sukkah? For this reason, we have received the commandment to live in a sukkah near the Days of Awe, after Yom Kippur, when our sins have been forgiven. We are thus free of all sin, a spirit of folly leaves us, and we can "know."

Sukkot: A Time for Soul-Searching

It is written, "You shall take for yourselves on the first day" (Vayikra 23:40).

The Sages say, "The first day – the first day in the accounting of sin" (Tanchuma, Emor 22). The Chiddushei HaRim states that Sukkot is called "the first day in the accounting of sin" because it is a time for soul-searching.

The Clouds of Glory that hovered above the Children of Israel in the desert are what pushed them to search their souls. Hence after the death of Aaron, when the Clouds of Glory disappeared, Sihon king of Heshbon came to fight against Israel (Bamidbar ch. 21). He is called the king of "Heshbon" (literally "accounting"), for it is this force that opposes Israel in regards to the attribute of soul-searching (heshbon hanefesh). In fact there is an opposite force acting against every good middah that characterizes Israel. When Sihon was killed in that war, the verse states: "Therefore hamoshelim say, 'Come to Heshbon' " (Bamidbar 21:27). Here the Sages ask, "What is the meaning of, 'Therefore hamoshelim say...'? Hamoshelim – those who rule their evil inclinations. 'Come to Heshbon' – come, let us consider the account of the world: The loss incurred by the fulfillment of a mitzvah against the reward secured by its observance; and the gain achieved by a transgression against the loss it involves" (Bava Batra 78b). In fact with the death of Sihon, the power of soul-searching was awakened.

Therefore each year, with the arrival of Sukkot, the light of the Clouds of Glory appear and awaken the power of soul-searching. Hence Sukkot is “the first day in the accounting of sin.”

In the Sukkah

It is written, “In sukkot you shall dwell for seven days” (Vayikra 23:42).

The Gemara states, “He should eat and drink and m’tayel [walk about] in the sukkah” (Sukkah 28b).

Rabbi Chaim of Sanz, the author of Divrei Chaim, explains that on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Jews have the opportunity to perform their Creator’s mitzvot and distance themselves from sin. Just as we received the mitzvot of these festivals, the Torah has also given us the mitzvah of the sukkah, in order that we may sanctify ourselves for Hashem in all that we do – in eating and drinking, in living, and even in walking about – and we are to take upon ourselves the fear of Heaven in all our daily acts. This is because man’s main purpose is to serve Hashem in regards to the matters of this world, thereby shining the light of the mitzvah on material pursuits.

Binding the Festival

Along the same lines, Rabbi Avraham of Slonim explained the expression *isru chag ba’avotim* (“bind the festival [offering] with cords” – Tehillim 118:27) by saying: We must bind the light of the festival (*chag*, which also designates the offering of the festival) even to things that are thick (*avim*, which evokes *avotim*, thick cords) – material things, things of this world.

This resembles a prince who was involved with bandits. One day, he repented and returned to his father the king, deciding to abide by his will. However the king did not trust the prince, and he never drew closer to him, for he was afraid that he would return to his former friends. What did the prince do? He encouraged these bandits to also repent of their evil ways and approach the king. At that point the king drew closer to his son, for he no longer feared the influence of the former bandits. Thus when we shine the light of the festival on worldly matters, it is as if we are promising not to move the light of the festival towards coarse materiality, but rather to move coarse materiality towards the light of festival, thereby elevating it.

GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Don’t Lose Hope!

Even if a person has not been careful with his language and words for a long time, he should be careful to safeguard them starting from now and for the rest of the days that Hashem will grant him. To what can this be compared? It is like a person who hired a caretaker to safeguard his vineyard for the summer, and yet the caretaker neglects his duties for three months, allowing the vineyard to be ruined. Thieves enter through breaches in the surrounding fence, and through these breaches come animals that eat its grapes. That said, will the owner completely abandon his vineyard to these animals from now on? On the contrary, he will increase the surveillance of his vineyard and mend its fences, paying even greater attention so that no more fruit are lost. The same applies here: We must make fences by distancing ourselves from bad company and not speaking ill of anyone. We must seek forgiveness from those whom we have wronged with our words, and for the rest of our lives we must be careful to only speak words of sanctity, only words that we absolutely need to earn a living. In this way we will be able to say, “Happy is my old age that has atoned for my youth.” – Shmirat HaLashon

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTARAH

The Coming of Mashiach

It is written, “On the day that Gog comes” (Ezekiel 38:18).

The Tur writes (Orach Chaim 56) that the phrase *yitgadal veyitkadash*, found in the Kaddish, is based upon the expression *vehitgadalti vehitkadashti* (“I will be exalted and I will be sanctified” – Ezekiel 38:23), written in regards to the war of Gog and Magog. Hashem’s Name will be exalted at that point, as it is written: “On that day Hashem will be one and His Name one” (Zechariah 14:9). Some say that the Kaddish is written in Aramaic in order to prevent the angels from becoming jealous of us, since we are uttering such beautiful praises, and also in order for the Holy One, blessed be He, to recall the destruction of the Temple and the exile of Israel. As the Gemara states, when Jews respond Amen, *yehei shemei rabba*, the Holy One, blessed be He, shakes His head and says: “Woe to the father who had to banish his children, and woe to the children who had to be banished from the table of their father” (Berachot 3a). Hashem, so to speak, worries over them, and the angels would raise accusations against us if they were to understand this. Hence we recite Kaddish in a language that they do not understand, namely Aramaic.

The Rambam writes, “From the sayings of our prophets, it would appear that the war of Gog and Magog will herald the era of Mashiach. Before that war begins, however, a prophet will arise to prepare Israel and correct their ways, as it is said: ‘Behold, I am sending you the prophet Eliyahu...’ [Malachi 3:23]. He will not come to pronounce the unclean clean, or the pure impure, nor to invalidate those who were considered valid, nor to validate those considered invalid. He will come only to bring peace to the world, as it says: ‘He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children’ [Malachi 3:24]. Some Sages believe that the prophet Eliyahu will arrive prior to the era of Mashiach. These things will not be understood until they actually take place, for the prophets did not receive an explicit prophesy about them. Neither have our Sages received a tradition in these matters; they can only expound the verses in Scripture to the best of their ability. This explains the disagreements on several issues related to Mashiach. Whatever the case, the sequence of future events is not a matter that should concern us, and we should not spend time or energy pursuing it. One should not delve too deeply into the midrashim which speak of these matters, for they lead neither to the fear nor the love of G-d. One must not attempt to calculate when the [final] redemption is expected. The Sages say, ‘Blasted be the bones of those who calculate the end’ [Sanhedrin 97b]. One is expected only to wait and believe that Mashiach will come” (Hilchot Melachim 12:2).

EISHET CHAYIL

Head and Heart

A man traveling from a distant place came to the home of Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Hermann Zatzal in the United States. On Friday morning, he knocked at his door and found Rebbetzin Hermann busy preparing for Shabbat. “Excuse me,” he said with hesitation, “I was wondering if I could stay by you and eat here for a few days, since I have to stay in New York and I need kosher meals. I was advised to come to your home, and I will gladly pay full price for it.” The Rebbetzin replied, “You can eat and stay here for as long as you like. As for the price, we can discuss it when you leave.” This man stayed with them for a few days, and ate all his meals in their home. When the time came for him to leave, he took out his wallet and got ready to pay, but the Rebbetzin exclaimed with astonishment: “Do you want me to sell the mitzvah of hospitality for money?” The man said, “But didn’t you say that we would discuss the price at the end?” The Rebbetzin replied, “I wanted you to be able to eat in peace.”

Rabbi Chaim Kreiswirth – The Av Beit Din of Antwerp

A Rosh Yeshiva in Europe accepted a certain number of weak students into his yeshiva, students whom Rabbi Chaim Kreiswirth Zatzal felt had little chance of developing relatively high levels of understanding. A few months later, Rabbi Chaim was asked to come and examine these students, which he proceeded to do. The first questions he asked were rather simple ones, and every student without exception correctly answered them all. The Rav then began to ask more complex questions, and to his great surprise every student correctly answered these questions as well! This took place a little before Purim, and on Purim this Rosh Yeshiva went, as he usually did, to Rabbi Chaim's home. He had barely sat down in the living room, when whispers began to spread among those gathered there. Rabbi Chaim asked them to be silent, and he rose before the Rosh Yeshiva. He then asked everyone to rise before him as well, saying: "He has succeeded in transforming weak students into those who properly understand a sugia, and he merits that we should rise before him." Rabbi Chaim also cited the Sages in saying, "Whoever teaches Torah, his place is with the Shechinah" (Midrash HaNe'elam, Lech Lecha). When he spoke, as he usually did, at one of the Siyum ceremonies for Daf HaYomi in Jerusalem, he raised the question: "Why do we use the expression 'an orphaned generation' to describe a generation from which a tzaddik has been taken? It is because, oftentimes, when someone becomes an orphan, the entire community takes care of him: People get together to collect money for him, to provide him with funds to live on, and to see to all his needs. Yet there are situations in which an orphan has everything he requires – with someone taking care of all his needs – and yet no one is more miserable than him, for he has no 'father who understands him.' He has no father 'who knows exactly what he needs.' He has no good and merciful father, a father who does not wait for him to ask for something, but rather perceives what he needs and acts even before his son senses that something is lacking. Thus an orphaned generation is one for which we cannot perceive or provide everything it needs."

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

Tzeddakah Saves from Death

In the writings of the Arizal, we find that he was once with his disciples in the field where the prophet Hosea ben Beeri is buried. The Arizal was revealing the secrets of the Torah to them, when suddenly he said: "Quickly, collect some tzeddakah from among yourselves, and we will send it to a certain poor man who lives near us, in such-and-such a place, a man by the name of Rabbi Yaakov Altrotz. He is weeping and complaining about his poverty to Heaven, and the Holy One, blessed be He, is furious with the entire town because it showed him no compassion. I can hear it being proclaimed throughout the Heavens that a mass of locust will come against all the surrounding areas of Sefat and destroy the entire harvest along with all the produce of the fields. Therefore hurry and send this tzeddakah to him, for with G-d's help we may yet abolish this decree!" The disciples immediately gave what they could, and the Arizal took the money and gave it to his disciple Rabbi Yitzchak HaCohen, directing him to quickly go see Rabbi Yaakov Altrotz and give him the money. That is precisely what he did: He quickly made it to the home of Rabbi Yaakov Altrotz, and he found him weeping and beseeching Hashem at the door of his home. He said to him, "Why are you weeping?" He explained that a water pitcher had broken, and he did not know what to do because of his poverty and the pain it caused him. Rabbi Yitzchak immediately gave the money to Rabbi Yaakov, who greatly rejoiced and blessed him. When Rabbi Yitzchak returned, the Arizal told him that the decree had already been annulled and there was no longer anything to fear. They were still speaking when a very strong wind carrying a countless number of locusts began to blow. The disciples were terrified, but the Arizal said to them: "Have no fear. The decree has already been annulled." In fact the locusts were all plunged into the sea and drowned, with not a single one remaining.

– Sefer Kav HaYashar, Ch. 9

Solely for the Love of G-d

Since the mitzvah of the lulav is so important that Jews give their souls for it and spend a great deal of money on it, and since the reward of those who fulfill this mitzvah is so great that they merit life in this world and in the World to Come, it is fitting for every man to pay great attention to performing it for Hashem's sake, not to seek honor for himself or to boast before others.

A certain tzaddik was extremely poor, and on the eve of Sukkot he came across a very beautiful etrog. He very much wanted to buy it, but did not have a penny in his pocket. In fact he did not even have money to pay for the meals of the festival. What did he do? Since he owned a very expensive pair of tefillin that he had inherited from his forefathers, he thought to himself: "I've already fulfilled the mitzvah of tefillin today, and there are nine days left before I will need them again. Yet I have a duty to fulfill the mitzvah of the etrog today, and if I don't buy one today, how am I going to fulfill the mitzvah during the festival? After all, an immediate mitzvah takes precedence over a distant mitzvah." He therefore sold his tefillin and used all the money to buy the beautiful etrog.

When his wife learned of this, her heart was filled with grief over these tefillin. Since she was in pain, she became upset and was angry with her husband, who had purchased nothing for the needs of the holiday. Since she was upset, she eventually flew into a rage and took the etrog, threw it to the ground, and rendered it passul. The tzaddik said, "I have no more tefillin. I have no more etrog. Will I also get angry? Certainly not!"

– Sefer HaToda'ah

IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA

Torah, Mitzvot, and Faith

The Rema wrote, "Those who are vigilant begin building their sukkah as soon as Yom Kippur ends, in order to proceed from one mitzvah to another" (Rema, Orach Chaim 624:5). We may also say that on Yom Kippur, faith is increased in the heart of man because he has confessed all his sins before the King of kings and asked for forgiveness. Hence it is a mitzvah to combine faith with the study of Torah and the performance of mitzvot, the latter two being found in the mitzvah of sukkah – Torah study and mitzvot performance together. How?

Although the mitzvah is obvious, how does it comprise Torah study as well? It is because the sukkah resembles a Temple that one makes in order for the Shechinah to dwell within. King Solomon inaugurated the Temple at Sukkot, although its construction was completed in the month of Cheshvan (Pesikta Rabbati 6). He nevertheless inaugurated it in the month of Tishri, right after Yom Kippur, in order to tell us that everyone must do the same – to proceed to Torah study and mitzvot performance right after having demonstrated their faith, since faith alone cannot endure when it is not accompanied by Torah study. Now there is no greater form of Torah study than when a person exiles himself from one place to another, as we read: "Exile yourself to a place of Torah" (Pirkei Avoth 4:14).

During Sukkot, each person leaves his home in order to enter a sukkah, which is like going into exile. Furthermore, in the Aggadah the Sages say: "Why do we make a sukkah after Yom Kippur? In order to tell you that on Rosh Hashanah, Hashem judges all the inhabitants of the world and seals the verdict on Yom Kippur. Perhaps the Children of Israel were condemned to go into exile? In this way, they make a sukkah and are exiled from their homes to the sukkah, and Hashem considers them to have been exiled to Babylon" (Pesikta D'Rav Kahana 2). From the fact that a person exiles himself from his home and enters his sukkah, which is like a Temple, the severity of the decree is reduced.