

The Path To Follow

Shabat Sukot

412

**A Hevrat Pinto
Publication**



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**Tishri 17th, 5772
October 15th, 2011**

Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

The Mitzvah of the Sukkah: Faith in G-d and His Mitzvot

We are familiar with the famous question: Why did Hashem command us to dwell in a *sukkah* during the month of Tishri instead of Nissan, when we actually departed from Egypt, as it is written: "That your generations may know that I made the Children of Israel dwell in *sukkot* when I took them from the land of Egypt" (Vayikra 23:43)?

The Tur (*Orach Chaim* 625) answers this question in the following way: Although we left Egypt during Nissan, we did not receive the order to build a *sukkah* at that time. This is because it was summertime, when everyone builds outdoor structures for shade. It would have therefore been impossible to know whether or not we were constructing it because of an order from the Creator. He actually commanded us to do this in Tishri, the rainy season, when most people leave their outdoors structures and live indoors fulltime. We, on the other hand, leave our homes and dwell in a *sukkah* at that time, thereby showing everyone that we are obeying the order of the King.

The very fact that we fulfill the *mitzvah* of dwelling in a *sukkah* during the month of Tishri, not Nissan, teaches us a great principle in serving Hashem. We know that people are constantly inundated with hardships, yet they always want to overcome them. In fact the time to overcome hardships and improve ourselves lasts all year long. How should a person go about doing this? During Nissan, the month of our deliverance, a person must remove *chametz* from his home (*i.e.*, his heart), thereby coming closer to Hashem. He should then continue to elevate himself during the month of Iyar, for that is when the *omer* is counted, a time to work on ourselves.

If that were not enough, a person should elevate himself even more during the month of Sivan, for it is then that he receives the Torah and through it cleaves to Hashem. He continues to work on himself during the months of Tammuz and Av, since everyone wants to rectify the causes of the Temple's destruction, sins such as *Lashon Harah* and baseless hatred. Above all, during Elul and Tishri, days of judgment and mercy, a person must return to Hashem, becoming pure and cleansed of all sin.

As a result of this, a person may end up becoming proud and telling himself, "I've corrected all my faults and now I'm complete, I'm perfect." Such thinking may lead him to fall from the spiritual heights that he has reached.

Since Hashem is merciful to us, it is precisely during this time – the month of Tishri – that we are commanded to build a temporary dwelling, to once again leave our homes and head out into a *sukkah* and shelter ourselves under the shadow of His wings. The

sukkah is the shadow of faith (Zohar III:103a), and we are to dwell in it so that faith may once again grow in our hearts, so that we no longer succumb to trials. Furthermore, during the festival of Sukkot the Holy One, blessed be He, comes to visit people in their *sukkah* with the seven holy and faithful shepherds, the *ushpizin*. Why does this happen? It is in order for the *ushpizin* to pour out blessings and success upon people, since in this way they will be able to overcome every trial that assails them. Moreover, the *ushpizin* stand by people not only during Sukkot, but on every day of the year, helping them to strengthen their Torah learning, *mitzvot* observance, and personal work. In reflecting upon this, we see that the presence of the seven *ushpizin* is a sign from Hashem that all our sins have been forgiven during the month of Tishri. This is similar to a person who committed a tremendous offense against his friend, but later asks for his forgiveness. How can he know that his friend has truly forgiven him with all his heart? If his friend comes to his home with a beautiful gift, he will know for certain that he has been forgiven. The same applies to the Holy One, blessed be He. On Sukkot we invite the seven *ushpizin* into our *sukkah*, and Hashem also comes with them. This proves that He has forgiven all our sins on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. What's more is that Hashem brings us a beautiful gift, namely faith, in order that we may believe in Him forever. By this gift we know that all our sins have been forgiven. By way of allusion, we note that the word *ichaper* ("He will atone") has the same numerical value (310) as the word *shai* ("gift"), since the very fact of being forgiven constitutes a gift from Hashem.

For our part, we must appreciate the gifts that Hashem gives us. We must strengthen ourselves in faith, the fear of Heaven, and in Torah so as to become vessels worthy of receiving such gifts. Hence on our part we build a *sukkah*, and not only do we build it, but we set up its posts as soon as Yom Kippur ends, as stated in Halachah (*Rema, Orach Chaim* 624:5). In other words, after our sins have been forgiven we demonstrate our desire to become vessels worthy of receiving Hashem's blessings, hence we immediately start building our *sukkah*. This proves that we are grateful to Hashem for all the good He does for us at every moment. It proves that we are grateful to Him for having forgiven us, and that we want to come even closer to Him. This is why, immediately after all evil has been eradicated on Yom Kippur, we begin to build our *sukkah*. We thereby prevent the Satan from sowing his seeds in us, and we fill our bodies and souls exclusively with *mitzvot*, faith in Hashem, and love. By truly acting in this way, we demonstrate our complete love for Hashem and His *mitzvot*.

The Four Species

The Midrash states, “ ‘The fruit of the *hadar* tree’ [Vayikra 23:40] symbolizes Israel: Just as the *etrog* has taste as well as fragrance, so Israel has among them men who possess learning and good deeds. ‘Branches of palm-trees’ also applies to Israel: As the palm-tree has taste but not fragrance, so Israel has among them men who possess learning but not good deeds. ‘And boughs of a myrtle tree’ likewise applies to Israel: Just as the myrtle has fragrance but no taste, so Israel has among them men who possess good deeds but not learning. ‘And willows of a brook’ also applies to Israel: Just as the willow has no taste and no fragrance, so Israel has among them men who possess neither learning nor good deeds. What then does the Holy One, blessed be He, do to them? To destroy them is impossible. ‘However,’ says the Holy One, blessed be He, ‘let them all be bound together in one bundle and they will atone one for another’ ” (Vayikra Rabba 30:12). With regards to this statement in the Midrash, namely that among the Jewish people there exists those who resembles a willow, which has neither taste nor fragrance (*i.e.*, people who have neither Torah nor good deeds), we must consider the following: On the verse, “*Rakatech* [your temples] are like a slice of pomegranate” (*Shir HaShirim* 4:3), our Sages have said: “Read not *rakatech* [your temples] but *rekanim shebak* [your empty ones]” (*Chagigah* 27a). In other words, even those who seem to be devoid of merit (“your empty ones”) are as filled with *mitzvot* as a pomegranate is with seeds. Therefore how can the Midrash say that among the Jewish people there are men who possess neither Torah nor good deeds? The answer is that this only applies when they are alone, when they are not bundled together with the *tzaddikim*, for in that case they possess neither taste nor fragrance. However when they connect themselves to Torah scholars, when they learn Torah from them and participate in their lectures, they become new people. At that point they obtain both taste and fragrance. Hence the Torah desired that we take them all together, that they should come closer to Torah scholars and receive both taste and fragrance.

The Gemara says in the name of Rabba: “The *lulav* in the right hand and the *etrog* in the left. What is the reason? The former constitutes three commandments and the latter only one” (*Sukkah* 37b). By way of allusion, we may say that the Gemara is asking why the *etrog* is on the left, since the *etrog* hints at the perfect Torah scholar, the most accomplished person among us, who has both fragrance and taste. It would therefore seem appropriate for the *etrog* to be held in the right hand. The Gemara answers this by saying that the taking of the *lulav* comprises three *mitzvot*, whereas the taking of the *etrog* comprises only one. Hence the *lulav* takes precedence. In alluding to the perfect Torah scholar, one who possess the greatest character traits, the Gemara is telling us that if he fails to support the simple among the people, those who resemble myrtles and willows – meaning that he fails to give them Torah classes – then despite the fact that this scholar is great, the small *lulav* is even greater.

– Rabbi Yehuda Tsadka, Kol Yehuda

On its Tree From Year to Year

It is written, “You shall take to yourselves on the first day the fruit of a *hadar* tree” (Vayikra 23:40). This refers to the *etrog*, which remains on its tree from year to year. The book *Vayakhel Moshe* provides us with a beautiful parable to explain this: There are some people who, as soon as Shemini Atzeret arrives, forget all the promises they made to Hashem and to themselves during the days of judgment. To them we may apply the verse, “From the sole of the foot [*regel*] to the head [*rosh*] there is no soundness” (Isaiah 1:6). In other words,

from Shemini Atzeret, a festival called *regel*, until the following Rosh Hashanah (a complete year later), there is no trace of integrity among them. Those who walk in righteousness, however, remain on the right path throughout the year. We know that the four species represent the four kinds of individuals among the Jewish people: The willow has neither taste nor fragrance, just as the wicked have neither Torah nor *mitzvot*. The myrtle has fragrance but no taste, just as those with good deeds but no Torah. The palm-tree has a taste but no fragrance, while the *etrog* has both taste and fragrance, just as the *tzaddikim* possess both Torah and *mitzvot*. As a result, says the Torah: “You shall take to yourselves” – the path you should take is shown by the *etrog*, “the fruit of a *hadar* tree,” which remains on its tree from year to year. That is, we are not to practice *mitzvot* solely during the holidays, but throughout the entire year. Now since the *etrog* stays on its tree all year round, let us also stay in a “tree” throughout the year. Which tree is that? It is the Torah, as Scripture states: “She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her” (*Mishlei* 3:18).

In the Shadow of the Defender of Israel

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev was without an *etrog*, and Sukkot was soon approaching. People searched for one on his behalf, and eventually a beautiful *etrog* was found, although it already belonged to someone else. The owner was asked to sell it, but he refused. Upon being told that the *etrog* was for the Rabbi of Berditchev, he said: “He’s a Jew like myself, and we’re both obligated to perform *mitzvot*.” He was then asked if he could come to Berditchev with his *etrog* and spend the holiday there, in which case both he and Rabbi Levi Yitzchak could use it in fulfilling the *mitzvah*. However the man still refused: “I want to be at home during the holiday.” He was then asked what it would take for him to come to Berditchev with his *etrog*. Thinking about this for a moment, he said that he would come if the Rav guaranteed that he would be at his side in Paradise. When the man arrived in Berditchev, he headed for the Rav’s *sukkah*. However the Rav asked him to get invited elsewhere that night, for he had many chassidim in his *sukkah* and it was already overcrowded. The man therefore went to another *sukkah* and asked to be given some bread, the bare minimum to fulfill the *mitzvah* of dwelling in a *sukkah*. Yet there too he was told that there wasn’t enough space because they had too many guests. The same thing happened at a third, and then a fourth *sukkah*! He finally burst into a *tenth sukkah* and said, “What is this place – Sodom?” At that point he was told the truth: “The Rav told us not to let you in.” Upon hearing that, the man returned to the Rav’s *sukkah* and demanded to know why he was not being allowed to perform the *mitzvah*. The Rav replied, “I want you to renounce the agreement that you made with me, that you would be at my side in Paradise.” What could the man do? On one hand he had the opportunity of spending eternity by the Rav’s side, while on the other hand he would have to forgo a Torah *mitzvah* in order for it to happen! He decided to renounce the agreement that ensured his presence in Paradise, at which point the Rav ordered that some wine and food be brought to him. The man then sat down and ate in the *sukkah*. After the holiday, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak said to him: “I truly promise that you *will* be at my side in Paradise. However I had to know to whom I was making this promise. That is, was he someone who was ready to give up everything for the sake of a Torah *mitzvah*? When I saw that you were ready to give up Paradise in order not to neglect a Torah *mitzvah*, I was reassured.”

Simchat Torah in the Bowels of Hell

Interned in a concentration camp during World War II, the Klausenburg Rebbe, Rabbi Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam *Zatzal*, told his companions that he would not work on Simchat Torah. They tried to convince him otherwise, for his life depended on it, but he held firm.

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True Joy

We have been given two *mitzvot* for the holiday of Sukkot that seem to be contradictory: (1) The *mitzvah* of *Simchat Yom Tov*, as it is written: "You shall rejoice on your festival" (*Devarim* 16:14); and (2) The *mitzvah* of dwelling in a *sukkah*, which according to our Sages means: "For the entire seven days, leave your permanent abode and dwell in a temporary abode" (*Sukkah* 2a). Now if it is a *mitzvah* to experience the utmost joy during Sukkot, then why did the Torah command us to live in a temporary dwelling during that time, since this hinders joy? Rabbi Yaakov Neiman *Zatzal*, the author of *Darchoi Mussar*, replies: "In reflecting upon this, we see that we cannot attain true joy unless we fully realize that this world is but a temporary place. A person who believes that man's goal is found in this world cannot possibly achieve inner peace. This is because, generally speaking, a person who is immersed in the vanities of this world experiences no joy, for joy is spiritual in nature. Only those who come closer to Hashem attain joy, since 'strength and joy are in His place' (I Chronicles 16:27). All the desires and vanities of this world lead a person to sadness, which is at the very heart of impurity." Furthermore, joy does not rest upon a person who is entrenched in the vanities of this world. Jealousy and desire prevent him from being happy, for he always has the feeling that he is missing something. If he has one hundred, he wants two hundred, and when he sees that others have more, this makes him sad. However if a person were to understand that this world is but a temporary dwelling place, he would not experience jealousy. Instead he would be happy with his lot. The *gaon* and *tzaddik* Rabbi Moshe Rosenstein *Zatzal*, the *Mashgiach* of the Lomza yeshiva, said: "The reason usually given for why we read *Kohelet* during Sukkot is for fear of expressing too much happiness, since this is the time of our joy. Hence we read *Kohelet* to remind ourselves that this world is nothing but vanity, which tempers our joy. The real reason, however, is precisely the opposite: We read *Kohelet* on Sukkot because it is a *mitzvah* to be extremely happy during this time, and as long as a person clings to the vanities of this world, it will be impossible for him to be truly happy. This is because he is constantly jealous of others, and his desires and love for honor plunge him into sadness. Hence we read *Kohelet*, which enables us to see that the vanities of this world are utterly futile. When we realize that they are not worth pursuing, we can fully accomplish the *mitzvah* of *Simchat Yom Tov*."

A True Story

Chosen From Among the Nations

One day the Chafetz Chaim received a letter in which he was asked to pray for mercy on behalf of the Jewish people, against whom evil decrees were about to be enacted. The Chafetz Chaim raised his eyes to Heaven and said, "In the holiday prayers we recite, 'You have chosen us from among the peoples. You have loved us...'. Have You 'chosen us' for pogroms?" The Chafetz Chaim continued to detail the tragedies that the Jewish people have endlessly endured. Then, too exhausted to say anything more, he cried in a loud voice: "Enough! Enough!" and fainted back into his chair. When Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein recounted this story, he asked how the Chafetz Chaim could have addressed Hashem in such a way. He replied: "A person may speak in this way when making a request for others, or on behalf of the Jewish people. We find the same thing with Moshe, for when the attribute of justice wanted to strike him for arguing with Hashem, it was not allowed to do so. This is because Hashem knew that 'Moshe argued like this only for the sake of Israel' [*Shemot Rabba* 5:22]. Similarly, the prayer of the Chafetz Chaim was for the sake of Israel."

When the Nazis saw that the Rebbe wasn't in his work detail on that day, they entered his hut and beat him to the point of unconsciousness, leaving him for dead. When the Rebbe's companions returned to their hut, they found the Rebbe, his face ablaze with emotion, dancing with all his might around a chair onto which a page from a prayer book had been placed.

Jacob's Blessing

It is written, "They are the myriads of Ephraim and the thousands of Manasseh" (*Devarim* 33:17).

Why does Ephraim conquer myriads but Manasseh only thousands? The answer is that when Jacob blessed them, he placed his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left hand on Manasseh's. Now Scripture states, "A thousand shall fall at your side, and a myriad at your right hand" (*Tehillim* 91:6). Joshua descended from the tribe of Ephraim and conquered myriads, while Gideon descended from the tribe of Manasseh and conquered thousands.

Which Came First?

It is written, "So Moshe, the servant of Hashem, died there in the land of Moab by the mouth of Hashem. He buried him in the depression in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-Peor, and no one knows his burial place to this day" (*Devarim* 34:5-6). Rashi states: "'Opposite Beth-Peor.' His grave had been readied there since the six days of Creation in order to atone for the incident at Peor. This was one of the objects created on the eve of Shabbat at twilight." Why did Rashi find it necessary to state that Moshe's grave had been prepared since the six days of Creation? The Mishnah tells us that Rabban Gamliel was asked a question while he was bathing in the bath of Aphrodite in the city of Akko. He was asked: "It is written in your Torah, 'No part of the banned property may adhere to your hand' [*Devarim* 13:18]. Why are you bathing in the bath of Aphrodite?" Rabban Gamliel replied, "We may not answer [questions relating to Torah] in a bath." Then upon coming out he said, "I did not come into her domain; she came into mine. Nobody says, 'The bath was made as an adornment for Aphrodite,' but instead he says, 'Aphrodite was made as an adornment for the bath' " (*Avodah Zarah* 44b). This means that since the bath existed before the statute of Aphrodite was placed there, we cannot say that the bath cannot be used due to idolatry! The Maharil Diskin says that what Rashi found difficult to explain was how Moshe could have been buried opposite Beit-Peor. Rashi therefore said that Moshe's grave had been there since the six days of Creation. In other words, Moshe's grave had not been placed next to the idol of Peor; the idol of Peor had been placed next to it.

– From Aish Dat

Overview of the Parsha

This week's *parsha* deals mainly with the events leading up to the death of Moshe, the eternal leader of the Jewish people. At first we read of Moshe's blessing of the tribes of Israel, each according to their status. At the beginning and the end of these blessings, Moshe stresses the uniqueness of Israel as Hashem's chosen ones, the people who were saved by Him and received the Torah. Later on we read of Moshe's ascension of Mount Nebo to see the land of Israel, as he had been commanded in *Parshiot Pinchas* and *Ha'azinu*. A connection to the land by looking upon it was granted to Moshe, although he was denied permission to enter it, as stated at the beginning of *Parsha Va'etchanan*. The last verses of this week's *parsha* deal with the death of Moshe, his burial, Israel's mourning for him, the inauguration of Joshua as his successor, and finally the greatness of Moshe. The Tannaim are divided on these last eight verses in terms of authorship. Some hold that Hashem dictated them while Moshe repeated and recorded His words with tears in his eyes, while others hold that Joshua, Moshe's disciple and successor, wrote them down (*Bava Batra* 15a).

The Spiraling Loop of Education

At the end of the “festival of the Harvest” (*Shemot* 23:16), as Sukkot is called, we celebrate the conclusion of the weekly Torah cycle for the year, as well as the beginning of the cycle for the new year. This is not what we do upon concluding other books, for as soon as we fully understand a book, we put it away. Regardless of our understanding, however, Hashem’s Torah always has more to offer. If only for that reason, it is not enough simply to duplicate our Torah readings of the past. We must use the knowledge we have attained from the previous year to learn with renewed enthusiasm and a sharper eye.

Most of the Torah study performed by the Sages did not consist of learning something for the first time, but rather in reviewing it. Elevating oneself in Torah comes from an in-depth revision of what we have already learned, as stated in the book *Orchot Tzaddikim* (section *Sha’ar HaTorah*). We do this not simply to remember things, but to *understand* them. When we read secular books as well, we rarely pay attention to every detail upon a first reading. It is only once we have thoroughly gone through a book that we pay more attention to additional factors, such as allusions and new points of view that give us a deeper and greater understanding of the whole. In *Sha’ar HaZechira* it is stated that a person with weak eyes cannot see gold or silver lines that are made on a fine design. Even if he can make out the entire design as a whole, he cannot see it as clearly as someone with good eyes. Similarly, if we have learned Torah and its wisdom during our youth, and we now have the impression that we understand it well, we still should not place our trust in this understanding, since our wisdom will grow stronger as we grow older. We will therefore understand even more things as subjects become clearer to us. This Torah – which on the surface is just like “water covered by water” – is different for those who go beneath the surface to plumb its depths, for everyone swims at a different depth. Everyone swims at a level that is suited to him. The book *Ohr Yechezkel* tells us that the Torah has one form in order for everyone to learn from it: The greatest learns according to his greatness, while the least learns according to his level. The same applies to the subject of education and serving Hashem. Everyone is headed in the same direction, but the road splits up according to an individual’s path. Like traveling in a upwards spiraling loop, in which we return to the same point each time but at a higher level, so should it be with our Torah study: Each time we read or learn something again, we must progress to an even higher level of understanding. We must not be content with a superficial repetition of what we have previously learned, for that would be like going around in circles.

Guard Your Tongue!

Learning Virtues From One’s Husband

In his commentary on *Mishlei*, the Meiri wrote: “There are many women who are very good. Yet who fits the description, ‘A woman of valor...far beyond pearls is her value’ [*Mishlei* 31:10]? It is a woman who rids herself of her father’s bad habits and takes on the good habits of her husband, adopting them to the point of becoming just like his sister or daughter, smiling at him even when he is angry, respecting him in poverty just as in wealth, and in age just as in youth. Her feet refuse to venture out, and her hands are eager to perform *mitzvot*. Even if she has many servants, she does not sit at home doing nothing, but instead works like one of them. She listens to what others say, and has no fear of responding. She takes pleasure in the happiness of her husband, and wishes him well when things go bad. She conducts herself pleasantly and is adorned with humility.”

Not Incompatible For Hashem

It is written, “*Vehaya* [And it shall be] that on that day, the day when Gog will come against the land of Israel, says Hashem G-d, that My fury will be aroused” (*Ezekiel* 38:18).

We need to understand what this means. Our Sages have said, “In every instance where *vehaya* is used, it denotes joy” (*Bamidbar Rabba* 13:5). Here the verse begins with the word *vehaya*, yet it ends with “My fury will be aroused.” How can these two things – joy on one hand and Hashem’s fury on the other – be compatible with one another? We must conclude that joy will result from the great sanctification of Hashem’s Name throughout the world. Everyone will acknowledge the truth, as it is written: “I will be exalted and I will be sanctified, and I will make Myself known before the eyes of many nations. Then they will know that I am Hashem” (*Ezekiel* 38:23).

That is why our joy will be great, for the entire world will have achieved the goal of knowing the Creator. The statement found at the end of verse 18 (“My fury will be aroused”) is not connected to joy, for this fury will be directed against Gog when it comes to fight against Israel. This is not comparable to what happens with people, for with them it is impossible to have joy and fury at the same time. However these two things can exist simultaneously with the Creator of the world, for He possesses no corporality whatsoever, all expressions to that effect being meant only to clarify things.

Your Eyes Shall Behold Your Teacher

Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel – The Av Beit Din of Krakow

Born in 5356, Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel was the son of Rabbi Yaakov, the Av Beit Din of Lublin. In his youth he was recognized as being extremely intelligent, a child prodigy in fact. All the leading Torah figures of the generation came to his father’s home to partake of the boy’s Torah. In 5410 Rabbi Heschel was named as the Rav of Lublin, yet only two years later, upon the death of the *gaon* Rabbi Yom Tov Heller *Zatzal* (the author of *Tosaphot Yom Tov* on the Mishnah), he was named as the Rav of the great city of Krakow. Upon arriving in Krakow for the first time, he said in his inaugural address: “The initials of ‘Behold, I will stand before you there upon the rock’ [*Shemot* 17:6] form the word *Heschel*, and the numerical value of ‘upon the rock’ is the same as that of *Krakow*.”

During the massacres of 5408-5409, when countless Jews were murdered without a trace, Rabbi Heschel made a tremendous effort to free *agunot*. He even convened a special court to deal with the problem. In one case he permitted an *agunah* to remarry, but after a few months “death stood at his feet.” From then on he stopped dealing with *agunot*. Rabbi Heschel served as the Rav of Krakow for 14 years, hence people said that he fulfilled the verse, “With a mighty *yad* [hand]” (*Shemot* 32:11), the numerical value of *yad* being 14. Rabbi Heschel feared no man, and his disciples included the author of the *Shach*, the author of *Birkat HaZevach*, and other *gaonim*.

Rabbi Heschel left this world on Tishri 20, 5424. He is buried in the ancient cemetery of the Rema in Krakow.