

The Path To Follow

The Festival of Sukkot

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For He Will Hide Me in His Sukkah

The festival of Sukkot, which immediately follows the Ten Days of Teshuvah, is the continuation of these days, our Sages having found an allusion to this in the verse: “Seek Hashem when He may be found; call upon Him when He is near” (Isaiah 55:6). Indeed, it is not just a continuation, but a new step in our spiritual awakening. In fact not only is G-d among us during the festival of Sukkot, He is also very close to us. He is truly with us, and we live in His shadow.

We find this idea expressed in Tehillim 27, which begins with the words: “Hashem is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? Hashem is the strength of my life; whom shall I dread?” In the Midrash, these words refer to the Yamim Noraim [Days of Awe]: “Our Sages expounded the text in reference to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur: He is my light – on Rosh Hashanah; and my salvation – on Yom Kippur” (Vayikra Rabba 21:4). On Rosh Hashanah the Holy One, blessed be He, shines His light upon us, and on Yom Kippur He forgives all our sins and saves us.

The psalm continues: “When evildoers approach me to devour my flesh, my tormentors and my foes against me, it is they who stumble and fall” (Tehillim 27:2). That is, when the Satan comes to accuse and the Angel of Death does all it can to harm and injure, they cannot do anything to me. Instead they fall into their own trap, for Hashem has already saved me from them. “Though an army would besiege me, my heart would not fear. Though war would rise up against me, in this I trust” (v.3). I have complete faith in the Creator of the universe, faith which comes from one thing – the holy Torah. It is designated by the term zot (“this”), as we read: Zot haTorah. In fact, “One thing I asked of Hashem, that shall I seek: That I may dwell in the House of Hashem all the days of my life, to behold the sweetness of Hashem and to visit His Sanctuary. For He will hide me in His sukkah on the day of evil; He will conceal me in the concealment of His tent; He will lift me upon a rock” (vv. 4-5).

If we look closely at this psalm, we see that Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur appear to man as a light, like deliverance from Heaven. Indeed, Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi said that on Yom Kippur, there is no need for any kind of preparation, for the day itself atones for sin. Conversely, when it comes to the festival of Sukkot, in order to merit, “He will hide me in His sukkah,” a person must fulfill what is mentioned beforehand: “One thing I asked of Hashem, that shall I seek.” A person must want this – he must desire it – and not just superficially. Instead, his entire will must be directed towards

this one goal: To obey Hashem’s mitzvot, to study His Torah, and to sanctify His Name.

In any case, we note that Sukkot deals with the fact that Hashem brings us into His domain and hides us in His tent. If we want to merit such great light – meaning such closeness to the Creator, being in His house, as it were – then we must first reflect upon the goal and nature of the festival.

Just Once

King Solomon did something surprising when he inaugurated the Temple. The Gemara tells us, “Rabbi Yochanan said that Israel did not observe Yom Kippur that year, and so they were worried. They said, ‘Perhaps...Israel has thereby incurred their doom,’ at which point a Celestial voice went forth and proclaimed to them: ‘All of you are destined for the life of the World to Come’” (Moed Katan 9a).

Rashi explains: “The Children of Israel did not observe Yom Kippur, because seven days before Sukkot they made a festival and celebration each day, as it is written: ‘At that time Solomon instituted the festival...for seven days and seven [more] days, fourteen days’ [I Kings 8:65].”

They did not observe Yom Kippur at that time! This is the only time in all the generations that they did not observe Yom Kippur. Why not? The commentators explain that because the Shechinah dwelled in abundant measure among the Children of Israel at that time – for the Holy One, blessed be He, had come to reign over the entire world through the Temple – everyone acknowledged His kingdom and the fact that He was among them. There was therefore no place for sin, and therefore no need, as it were, for Yom Kippur. The joy over the inauguration of the Temple, which they celebrated for fourteen days, provoked a great spiritual awakening among all the people and made them cleave to the Creator of the universe in an extraordinary way. Hence they did not need Yom Kippur.

The Inauguration of the Temple on Sukkot

King Solomon wanted to send a clear message to the entire Jewish people: If the Holy One, blessed be He, is constantly among us, sin will be no more! As a result, when did he inaugurate the Temple? During the festival of Sukkot!

He extended the festival to last fourteen days, seven days before Sukkot and seven days for the festival itself. The reason is that the

festival of Sukkot is when the Shechinah dwells among us, with nothing separating us from it, as it is written: “He will hide me in His sukkah” – alongside Him. As a result, there was no better time for the inauguration of that magnificent Temple, thanks to which Hashem dwelled among us, just as He promised His servant Moshe: “Let them make Sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them” (Shemot 25:8).

This is why “Solomon instituted the festival...for seven days and seven [more] days, fourteen days.” In other words, this was one long festival, comprised of fourteen days, a festival whose sole purpose was to bring us closer to our G-d, as it is written: “He will hide me in His sukkah” and “that I may dwell among them.”

In Hashem’s Shadow – Within His Palace

In fact just being inside the sukkah with the Creator of the world is something that obligates us to act differently there. The Ben Ish Hai writes, “The sukkah is the shadow of Hashem, evoking the Clouds of Glory. Hence we do not act with levity there, nor should we bring pans or large pots of food used for cooking inside. We should also not bring a large pitcher of water there, and we should remove a candle from the sukkah once it has gone out, as the Levush states. We must also not wash utensils in the sukkah, not even one, as the Acharonim say. However washing small utensils, such as those used for drinking coffee, is not serious if we are alone” (Ben Ish Hai, Parsha Ha’azinu, First Year).

In fact when a king arrives and stays with his subjects, they are obligated to act respectfully, in a dignified way. All their actions, even if generally acceptable on ordinary days, must be weighed and reweighed in the king’s presence. If such is the case for a human king, how much more does it apply for the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, Whose Presence fills the earth! When Hashem is so close to us – when we find ourselves in His shadow, within His palace – we must be extremely careful!

We may add something else here: As we know, the mitzvah of sukkah differs from all other mitzvot, for even when we enter the sukkah – even when we dwell within it, sleep there, and spend the entire day there – if we do not have the intention of fulfilling the command, “you shall dwell in sukkot,” we have not fulfilled the mitzvah of sukkah. The commentators have lingered over this issue. How is the mitzvah of sukkah different from the other mitzvot? They explain that the duty of having the correct intention is found in the verse, “So that your generations may know that I made the Children of Israel dwell in sukkot” (Vayikra 23:46). Once we have explained the essence of this festival, its words can then be perceived as the pearl of wisdom which they are. This is because a person who enters the sukkah without the proper intentions – one who attempts to fulfill the mitzvah of sukkah without perceiving or feeling G-d’s tremendous closeness – has not fulfilled it.

In fact how can a person find himself within the royal palace and shelter himself in the shadow of the king without paying any attention to this? How can he stay with the king himself without being moved by it? Without paying attention to it? Hence doing so without the proper intentions cannot be described as fulfilling the mitzvah of sukkah, period. Such a person has not fulfilled the duty to feel what the sukkah offers, which is why he has not done anything.

We Know Who is Innocent

The lulav that we take on the first day of Sukkot is a sign that we have emerged victorious from the judgment of Yom Kippur. Thus the verse states, “Then all the trees of the forest will sing with joy before Hashem, for He will have arrived. He will have arrived to judge the earth” (Tehillim 96:12-13). Who is the verse speaking of? It is speaking of the Children of Israel and the nations of the world, whom the Holy One, blessed be He, judges on Yom Kippur. The two enter into judgment, but we do not know who will win. The Holy One, blessed be He, says: “Take your lulavim in hand, and everyone will know that you have won the case.” This is like two people who go before the king to be judged, yet nobody knows who will win. The one who emerges with a white staff or an apple in his hand, we know that the king has declared him innocent.

– Da’at Zekenim

Strengthening Yourself in the Service of G-d

According to the simple meaning, the idea behind this mitzvah is that the festival celebrates the gathering of the harvest, which is a time of joy. The Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to confer merit upon us in order for our joy to be complete, joy that is both material and spiritual, and which we earn through mitzvot. He chose the four species, which represent the bodily organs, because all our spiritual efforts depend on thought, speech, and deed.

The etrog resembles the heart, upon which all thoughts depend; the willow resembles the eyes, which lead to sin; the myrtle resembles the lips, which are the source of speech; and the palm resembles the spine, which is the foundation of the entire body.

When a person sees the four species, he can focus his thoughts on the personal work he must do to perfect his character. He will not grow proud of his abundant harvest, nor will he go where his heart and eyes lead him.

– The Radbaz, Ta’amei HaMitzvot

All My Bones Will Declare

We must explain the four species as an allusion to the four body parts that perform basic functions, be it for every mitzvah or sin. These consist of the heart, eyes, lips (since many mitzvot, as well as many sins, depend on speech), and spine (the foundation of the body, its power stemming from the brain). The etrog resembles the heart, the myrtle resembles the eyes, the palm resembles the spine, and the willow branches resemble the lips. This means that when a person sins through any one of these four parts, he can procure atonement through the four species, for all sin finds atonement when its corresponding mitzvah is performed. Concerning this mitzvah, the Sages say in Tanchuma: “All my bones will declare, O Hashem, ‘Who is like You?’”

– Seder HaYom

A Unified Whole, Without Division

The essence of this mitzvah and its profound significance is that we must proclaim G-d’s Name with all our heart and all our soul, being completely devoted to our Father in Heaven. Just as the lulav unites all the branches that comprise it, and just as everything becomes a unified whole without any division, likewise a person must unite his thoughts and opinions, turning everything towards a single point without letting his thoughts stray one way or another.

We find this idea in the palm, as well as in the other parts of the lulav. The tzaddik is compared to the palm tree in order to tell us that the only one who can be called a tzaddik is a person whose heart is completely united in all its parts.

– Seder HaYom

Zusha! I Sense the Wonderful Fragrance of Gan Eden!

Reb Uri lived in Yanov, where he worked as a teacher. His meager salary barely served to feed his family, and his wife also worked to meet their household needs, doing various jobs to bring in a few extra cents. Every week, Reb Uri would put aside one gold coin that he took from his salary. Even during the most difficult weeks, times of poverty and want, he never stopped putting aside a gold coin and placing it in a box.

At the end of the year, during the Ten Days of Teshuvah, he would open this box and count the roughly 50 gold coins that he had saved over the course of the year. He would then say goodbye to his wife and children, and take to the road.

Mitzvot were very important to him, and for the mitzvah of the four species he would skimp on his own food throughout the year. He would usually pay dearly in order to obtain a very beautiful etrog in honor of the festival of Sukkot. All the residents in the city knew that the etrog of Reb Uri the teacher was the most beautiful one around, and naturally they came in droves to recite the blessing on it.

In the city of Lemberg, there was a great market of etrogim, and the most magnificent ones were to be found there. Reb Uri would travel to Lemberg by foot, for he didn't have enough money to rent a carriage. However making such a journey did not bother him, and he was happy to go to such lengths for the sake of this precious mitzvah.

One year, as he was making his way to Lemberg, he stopped at an inn to rest. While there, he drank something hot in order to warm up, and towards evening he went to a corner of his room to pray. During Shemoneh Esrei, a terrible cry reached his ears, followed by the sound of moaning. As soon as he had finished praying, he went into the courtyard to see what had happened, for perhaps he could help someone. Outside, he saw the innkeeper trying to calm a man whose face was filled with anxiety and hopelessness. From time to time, a deep sigh emerged from his chest.

He appeared to be a wagon driver, and he was weeping without stop. A disaster had befallen him, for his horse, which was old and tired, had fallen dead on the road. "I no longer have any livelihood left," cried the man. "How will I be able to feed my children now? The only thing that awaits me is death," he cried out bitterly, all while shaking his whip.

"It's forbidden to lose hope," Reb Uri said as he tried to console him. "Trust in G-d, for He can help you." Reb Uri's words were useless, however, for they fell on a man who had lost hope and whose ears were deaf. "Who will help me?" the driver cried out in despair. "Who will give me a horse? It costs a fortune!"

"I have a good horse that's worth 80 gold coins," the innkeeper blurted out. "However given the disaster that you've experienced, I'm prepared to sell it to you for only 50 gold coins." The driver exclaimed, "Fifty gold coins? I only have five! Woe to me and woe to my children! I no longer have any reason to live!"

Reb Uri felt great compassion welling up inside of him at that point, for he had exactly 50 gold coins in his pocket. With that money, he could save the livelihood of a poor Jew! He decided on the spot that it was better to help a Jew live than to buy the most beautiful etrog possible. "What's the final price that you're willing to accept for your horse?" he asked the innkeeper. "I already said what it is," he said in an irritated tone. "It's worth 80 gold coins, and I'm willing to sell it for 50!" After a short discussion, the innkeeper agreed to forgo 5 gold coins. Thus Reb Uri gave him 45 gold coins in hard cash, and the horse was given to the driver.

At first the driver wasn't able to say a single word, but then he couldn't stop praising and glorifying his benefactor. "You shouldn't thank me, but rather Hashem," Reb Uri modestly said. "I've already told you that He is all powerful and can always help."

Reb Uri hurried to get back on the road to Lemberg. He now had only had five gold coins, with which he could only purchase a very ordinary etrog. Though certainly kosher, it was nothing like the etrogim he had in previous years. He was therefore embarrassed to spend the holidays in his own town. In prior years, everyone wanted to come and recite the blessing over his etrog, but now what could he provide them with? An etrog that was worth only 5 gold coins?

Upon his wife's suggestion, he decided to spend Sukkot in a place where people

did not know him. He chose the city of Lizensk, where the tzaddik Rabbi Elimelech lived. Reb Uri therefore left for Lizensk. On the first day of the holiday, he went to the Beit HaMidrash, sat in a corner behind the entire congregation, and immersed himself in prayer. Rabbi Elimelech was preparing to recite Hallel, when all of a sudden he began looking this way and that, as if searching for someone. He abruptly turned to his brother, the tzaddik Rabbi Zusha, and said to him: "Zusha! I sense the wonderful fragrance of Gan Eden filling the synagogue!" The saintly brothers walked among the faithful, going from bench to bench until they reached the last row. There they stopped by the young Reb Uri, who was focused in prayer. "Here," said the tzaddik. "It's from here that this wonderful fragrance is emanating, from the etrog of this young man." Reb Uri raised his eyes and was flustered. The congregants then turned their attention to him, but the tzaddik did not give him time to be embarrassed, for he immediately asked him to reveal where his etrog came from. Reb Uri explained the story to him, and the tzaddik said: "Your etrog is truly special. It carries the fragrance of the great mitzvah which you performed by saving a Jewish family! Return home, and you will become a leader in Israel. But before you leave, allow us to recite the blessing on your etrog."

Reb Uri indeed became a great leader in Israel, being known as the "Seraph of Sterlisk," may his merit protect us all. – Tzaddikim and Seraphim

In the Light of the Parsha

Some Merit an Additional Soul on Festivals as Well

Although it is a Halachah that we do not recite a blessing on aromatic herbs at the conclusion of a festival, and although our teachers the Ba'alei HaTosaphot state (Pesachim 102b) that this is because an additional soul is not given to man on festivals, some of the Sages still recited a blessing on herbs at the conclusion of a festival (Ohr Zarua 2:92, citing Rabbeinu Gershom). From the fact that they did this, we may conclude that man is given an additional soul even on festivals. Several Rishonim have stated that such an additional soul does exist during festivals as well (Tosaphot Pesachim ibid. citing the Rashbam; also in a response of the Rashba cited by the Abudraham regarding the conclusion of Shabbat).

Let us think about this: We learn of the existence of an additional soul from what is said regarding Shabbat: "On the seventh day He rested vayinafash [and was refreshed]" (Shemot 31:17). Here the Sages explain, "Once it [Shabbat] has ended, woe that the [additional] soul is lost" (Beitzah 16a). Vayinafash is not said in regards to festivals, but only in regards to Shabbat. Therefore how do we know that man receives an additional soul on festivals as well?

We may explain this according to a statement of the Sages: "The Sabbaths and festivals were given only for the sake of Torah study" (Yerushalmi, Shabbat 15:3). They also said, "Moshe laid down a rule for the Israelites that they should enquire and give expositions concerning the subject of the day: The laws of Pesach on Pesach, the laws of Shavuot on Shavuot, and the laws of Sukkot on Sukkot" (Megillah 32a). When a person studies Torah during a festival, not wasting his time strolling around or having meaningless conversations, he will rejoice in the light of Torah and an additional soul will enter him. In fact the Torah is called light, as it written: "For a mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light" (Mishlei 6:23), and the soul of man is also called a lamp, as it is written: "A man's soul is the lamp of Hashem" (ibid. 20:27). When a man is immersed in the study of Torah and cleaves to its words, he merits an additional soul, as it is said: "Whosoever occupies himself with the Torah for its own sake, his learning becomes an elixir of life for him" (Taaniith 7a). Now someone who learns Torah while people go out to chat – thereby demonstrating their indifference to a festival by neglecting the study of Torah – such learning is of the most unselfish kind, and he merits an additional soul because of the Torah that he learns on that festival. This is because the Holy One, blessed be He, draws closer to man on a festival than on a regular day.

We may therefore say that the additional soul of a festival differs from the additional soul of Shabbat. The additional soul of Shabbat enters a person even if he does not deserve it. However the additional soul of a festival does not enter a person if he has not studied Torah. This is why the Sages did not institute a blessing over aromatic herbs at the conclusion of a festival. Not everyone has an additional soul on festivals, and only certain merit it because they study for the sake of Torah.

A Few Laws and Customs Regarding the Four Species

They Shall Be One

The Shulchan Aruch states, “We must join the etrog with the lulav for the shaking and shake them together” (Orach Chaim 651:11).

The custom of joining the etrog and lulav for the blessing, as well as when they are shaken, is cited by the Beit Yosef along with a reminder of what the Rezanati says on Parsha Emor: “We must join the etrog and other species together so as not to take this arrangement apart. This secret was revealed to me in a dream on the first night of the festival of Sukkot. An elderly Ashkenaz man by the name of Rabbi Yitzchak [i.e., the Arizal] was at my home. In a dream, I saw him writing the Name Yud – Hei. He then separated the second hei from the first three letters. I said to him, ‘What are you doing?’ He replied, ‘This is the custom where I live.’ I criticized him for this and wrote out the Name in its entirety, stunned by this spectacle and not understanding it. On the following day, at the time of taking the lulav, I saw that he was only shaking the lulav with its three components – not with the etrog – and I understood the meaning of my dream.” The Sages allude to this secret in the Midrash: “The fruit of the hadar tree. [Vayikra 23:40]. Hadar symbolizes the Holy One, blessed be He, of Whom it is written: ‘You are clothed with glory and majesty [hadar]’ [Tehillim 104:1]. Branches of date palms. This also symbolizes the Holy One, blessed be He, of Whom it is written: ‘The righteous will flourish like a date palm’ [Tehillim 92:13]. Twigs of a plaited tree. This symbolizes the Holy One, blessed be He, of Whom it is written: ‘He stood among the myrtle trees’ [Zechariah 1:8]. And brook willows. This also symbolizes the Holy One, blessed be He, of Whom it is written: ‘Extol the One Who rides upon the skies [aravot], with His Name Y–H’ [Tehillim 68:5]” (Vayikra Rabba 30:9). Thus we see that all the species allude to Hashem.

You Shall All Form a Single Group

The Midrash describes the allusions contained in the four species, which symbolize the Jewish people: The etrog, which possesses both taste and fragrance, alludes to the tzaddikim, who possess both Torah and good deeds. The lulav, which possesses taste but not fragrance, alludes to average Jews, who possess Torah but not good deeds. The Midrash gives similar analogies for the other species. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: “Form yourselves into a single group, like one person, so that there are no leftovers among My children. If you do this, I will glorify Myself in you.” The Vilna Gaon states, “Consequently, we must gather and join the four species when we take them and shake them.”

The new book *Orchot Chaim* cites the Rashba in stating that we must join the etrog and lulav in such a way that there is no space between them at their juncture, which is done by means of the myrtle and willow branches. We find the same idea in the book *Yosef Ometz*: The lulav must have the willow on the exterior to one side, in such a way that we bring the etrog to that side when we take it. The four species will then be truly joined together as one.

Corresponding to the Heart

The Shulchan Aruch states, “We must take the bundle in the right hand, with the head towards the top and the body towards the bottom, and the etrog in the left hand” (Orach Chaim 651:2).

The Gemara cites Rabba in explaining why we take the lulav in the right hand and the etrog in the left: “The lulav in the right hand and the etrog in the left. Why so? The former constitutes three mitzvot

[the palm, myrtle, and willow branches], while the latter only one [the etrog]” (Sukkah 37b).

The author of *Akedat Yitzchak* gives another explanation for why the lulav must be held in the right hand and the etrog in the left. It is because the etrog represents the heart, as in: “You shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart.” This is like the tefillin that we wrap around the left arm in order to be near the heart. Because of this, says the *Akedat Yitzchak*, it is fitting to pay particular attention to the beauty of the etrog, to its perfection and appearance. This is because the etrog alludes to the tzaddikim, who are perfect in their deeds, having a good taste and fragrant odor, a reference to those who possess Torah and good deeds.

A Good Custom

The book *Bikkurei Yaakov* states, “I have seen good people who usually take the lulav when we recite kaddish after Hallel, and after Hoshanah. To me, this appears to be a good custom. The lulav should not seem like a burden that we seek to rid ourselves of once the mitzvah has ended.”

Negotiating

From a remark of the gaon Rabbi Haim Benvenisti Zatzal, we learn of an ancient custom that was practiced in Izmir during the festival of Sukkot.

He writes: “People usually sell etrogim by proclaiming through a shamash: ‘We must give [such-and such] for an etrog.’ Whoever wants to add to this amount, he is given the mitzvah. After the festival, he pays what he promised.”

This custom corresponded to the reality of that era, when not everyone could purchase an etrog and lulav, either because they did not have the money, or because the four species were impossible to obtain. Hence the leaders of the community purchased the four species in the name of the entire community, and they sold the merit of the mitzvah on the first day of Sukkot (which is permitted for the needs of the community and for mitzvot on Shabbat and festivals). The individual who received the mitzvah thereby covered the entire community in regards to the mitzvah of the four species.

The Ya’avetz strongly opposed this custom. In a response that appears in his book *Mor UKetzia*, he mentions this custom and states that it constitutes a desecration of the festival, for the prohibition against negotiating originates from the Torah.

The Acharonim respond that we must keep this custom, given that the etrog is only being purchased in order to fulfill an obligation. The money is then placed into the community fund, and therefore it cannot be called negotiating.

Guard Your Tongue!

Not Even for his Father or Rav

Regarding the prohibition against talebearing, it makes no difference whether the speaker engages in talebearing willingly or the listener suspects something and pressures the speaker into telling him what another person said about him. Even if a person’s father or Rav pressures him into recounting what another person said against him, and even if it only constitutes the “dust” of talebearing, it is still forbidden.

– Chafetz Chaim