

The Path To Follow

Shabat Sukot

511

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Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

In the Shadow of Hashem by the Power of Torah and Mitzvot

As we know, the festival of Sukkot is surrounded by numerous mitzvot. These include the mitzvah of dwelling in a sukkah, the mitzvah of taking the four species, the mitzvah of rejoicing, and so on. However when we think about this a little, surprising questions come to mind. For example, what is the secret of the sukkah, and why do we celebrate Sukkot in the month of Tishri, after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, rather than in some other month?

Going further, we may ask several more questions: Why, for example, do we invite the holy ushpizin (seven “faithful shepherds”) during Sukkot instead of Pesach, or any other festival for that matter? What is the significance of taking the four species? Furthermore, the Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 30:2) draws a connection between the verses, “You shall take for yourselves on the first day” (Vayikra 23:40) and, “You will make known to me the path of life, the fullness of joys in Your Presence” (Tehillim 16:11). What exactly is the connection between these verses?

My dear brothers, we all want to live a long life, especially in the present time, a time of danger and terror when nobody knows what will happen next. Although we can leave our homes in complete health, how many open miracles do we need to return home at the end of the day in the same state? How can we truly merit to live a long life, and what is the secret elixir of life?

In several places throughout the Talmud and Midrashim, the Sages have revealed that the Torah is the elixir for a good life. That is, studying Torah and performing its mitzvot constitute an elixir of life. In fact the Sages have said that for one who studies Torah, it becomes an elixir of life, while the opposite occurs for someone who fails to do the same.

This is precisely why the Midrash connects the verse, “You shall take for yourselves on the first day” with “You will make known to me the path of life, the fullness of joys in Your Presence,” for the Torah is the light of man’s life. As we know, the Torah is also the light of the world, as it is written: “For the mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light” (Mishlei 6:23). During the festival of Sukkot, when a person comes to dwell in his sukkah, he is sheltering himself in the shadow of the Holy One, blessed be He. How is it possible to shelter oneself in the shadow of Hashem, since He is a consuming fire? It is by living a certain way of life, a Torah way of life, for it is an elixir of life for all time. As such, a person can indeed shelter himself in the shadow of Hashem, and by means of the Torah everyone can come closer to Him. In fact one who studies Torah is Hashem’s child, which means that every gate is open to him and no one can prevent him from drawing closer to Hashem.

The Midrash states that this is why the verse, “You shall take for yourselves on the first day” mentions lekichah (taking), for the Torah is also called a lekach, as it is written: “For I give you good lekach, do not forsake My Torah” (Mishlei 4:2). Thus one who studies Torah merits a long life. He also merits “the fullness of joys in Your Presence,” for Torah study gives man joy, both in his spiritual and material life, since he is

constantly happy. On this subject it is written, “The statutes of Hashem are upright, rejoicing the heart” (Tehillim 19:9).

Reflecting on this, we can also find an allusion to Torah in the four species. The etrog alludes to Torah because it contains the letters of taryag, which evokes the 613 mitzvot of the Torah. The lulav has the same numerical value (68) as the word chaim (“life”), which is the life of Torah. The myrtle (hadass) alludes to the secrets of the Torah, and the willow (aravah) alludes to the Torah’s pleasantness (arevut). What is the secret behind all this? By taking the four species during the festival of Sukkot, we are showing Hashem that we want to connect to His Torah in all these ways, be it through the hidden or revealed aspects of the Torah. We especially want to sense the pleasantness of the Torah.

It is only in this way that we can merit life, for as we said, man’s purpose in this world is to live a life of Torah. Hence we invite the holy ushpizin, the Patriarchs, into our sukkah precisely on Sukkot. Although we never stop mentioning the merit of the Patriarchs in our prayers during the month of Tishri, how are we worthy of evoking this merit? After all, do we follow in their ways? Are we as holy and pure as they were? Do we perform mitzvot and good deed as they did?

When we take shelter in the shadow of Hashem by the power of Torah, and when we take the four species (which also allude to Torah study), we invite the holy Patriarchs into our sukkah to show them that we truly want to walk in their ways. We demonstrate that we yearn to draw closer to the Holy One, blessed be He, through the study of Torah. We therefore say to them, “Come sit with us. See that Israel is not abandoned and that we have strived to study Torah and perform mitzvot as you did.” We may also say that we invite the ushpizin so they can defend and help us walk in the ways of Torah and mitzvot.

This is why we celebrate the festival of Sukkot after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Once we have completely repented and evoked the merit of the Patriarchs, we can celebrate our desire to devote ourselves to the Torah and its mitzvot, as the holy Patriarchs did. We must realize, however, that the Torah is not found with one who is proud. With regards to such a person, Hashem and him cannot live together in this world. Furthermore, the Torah is only acquired by one who is humble (Taanith 7a). In fact Moshe was the humblest of all men, and he bequeathed the Torah to us. Thus the Torah is forever linked to his name, as it is written: “Remember the Torah of My servant Moshe” (Malachi 4:22).

Hence we leave our permanent dwellings for temporary ones during Sukkot, for this alludes to humility. By doing so, we express our ardent desire to study a great deal of Torah, as well as the fact that we want to draw closer to Hashem during this festival, a time of joy and gladness. Then if accusers appear, we will immediately shake the lulav to chase them away. All this is only possible, however, if we yearn to study Torah in depth. Nothing can impede our will, and if we truly want to, we can achieve great success in Torah and draw closer to the Holy One, blessed be He.

A Few Gems on the Festival of Sukkot

The Waving of the Lulav

The Talmud states, “Rabbi Chama bar Ukva said in the name of Rabbi Yossi the son of Rabbi Chanina: ‘He waves them to and fro in order to restrain harmful winds, up and down in order to restrain harmful dews.’ ... Rabbi Acha the son of Yaakov used to wave [the lulav] to and fro, saying, ‘This is an arrow in the eye of Satan’ ” (Sukkah 37b-38a).

It seems that we should ask why Rabbi Acha provoked the Satan by saying, “This is an arrow in the eye of Satan.” He certainly did not ignore what the Talmud says concerning Pelimo, who provoked the Satan and greatly suffered as a result.

The Talmud states, “Each day Pelimo used to say, ‘An arrow in Satan’s eyes!’ One day – it was the eve of the Day of Atonement – [the Satan] disguised himself as a poor man and called out at his door. Bread was therefore taken out to him. ‘On such a day,’ he pleaded, ‘when everyone is inside, should I be outside?’ He was allowed inside and bread was offered to him. ‘On a day like this,’ he urged, ‘when everyone sits at the table, should I sit alone?’ He was led to the table and sat down. As he sat, his body was covered with pus-filled sores, and he was behaving repulsively. ‘Sit properly,’ [Pelimo] rebuked him. He replied, ‘Give me a glass,’ and one was given to him. He coughed and spat his saliva into it. When they scolded him, he swooned and died. Then [the household] heard people crying out, ‘Pelimo has killed a man, Pelimo has killed a man!’ Fleeing, he hid in a privy. [Satan] followed him and [Pelimo] fell before him. Seeing how he was suffering, he disclosed his identity and said to him, ‘Why have you spoken like this?’ [Pelimo replied] ‘And what should I have said?’ [The Satan answered] ‘You should have said, “The Merciful One rebuke Satan” ’ ” (Kiddushin 81ab).

That being the case, we need to understand why Rabbi Acha the son of Yaakov used to say, “This is an arrow in the eye of Satan” when he waved the lulav.

We may explain by citing the following statement from the Talmud: “Rabbi Levi said: Both Satan and Peninah had a pious purpose [in acting as adversaries]. Satan, when he saw that G-d was inclined to favor Job, said: ‘Far be it that G-d should forget the love of Abraham.’ Of Peninah it is written, ‘Her rival provoked her again and again in order to irritate her’ [I Samuel 1:6]. When Rabbi Acha the son of Yaakov gave this exposition in Papunia, Satan came and kissed his feet” (Bava Batra 16a). According to this statement, we can understand why nothing happened to Rabbi Acha for having cursed the Satan. He was not afraid of him, for he maintained friendly relations with the Satan, which even kissed his feet.

– Derashot La-Moadim

A Pearl From the Rav

In his book *Pahad David*, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita says that by carefully examining Scripture, we see something amazing. Instead of thanking Hashem for having forgiven us, Hashem actually thanks us! Hashem expresses His gratitude to us by saying, “I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me into the desert, into an unsown land” (Jeremiah 2:3). In other words: You have shaken the forces of impurity on your own and have followed Me into the desert. You abandoned everything to make of yourselves a desert for Me, and you went into an unsown land for My sake. In fact you took it upon yourselves to sow it with faith and to labor in the performance of mitzvot, for nothing comes easy. This is why I have come to visit you in your sukkah with the ushpizin. From here we learn that a person must thank Hashem for all His kindnesses, since He does not want us to become dejected or lose hope. This is why He commanded us to build a sukkah, and it is why He comes

to visit us, thereby enabling us to overcome our trials and grow spiritually. This is the essence of the sukkah – expressing gratitude to Hashem – for by our own deeds we are unworthy of G-d’s kindnesses. Since Hashem is grateful to us and tremendously lenient, we must also be grateful to Him in kind. We must cleave to Him and overcome our most difficult obstacles, elevating ourselves in Torah, faith, and good character traits.

The Entire Body in the Mitzvah

It is written, “Vayehi veshalem sukko [And His sukkah was in its entirety] and His dwelling was in Zion” (Tehillim 76:3).

Jews have two mitzvot that must be performed with one’s entire body: Dwelling in a sukkah and living in the land of Israel. This is alluded to in the expression *vayehi veshalem* (“and was in its entirety”). Which mitzvah is performed with one’s entire body? The answer is “His sukkah,” meaning the mitzvah of dwelling in a sukkah. Similarly, “His dwelling was in Zion” refers to the mitzvah of living in the land of Israel.

– The Vilna Gaon

A Truly Happy Person

For the festival of Sukkot, we have received the command to leave our spacious and beautiful homes in order to live in a temporary dwelling that is devoid of creature comforts. We need to understand something about this. Since we have the mitzvah to rejoice during the festival of Sukkot, it would seem more logical to move into a luxury hotel with our entire family during this time. Why instead have we been commanded to dwell in a sukkah? The Sages of Israel have explained this by means of a parable: The son of the king had an illness that made him anxious and depressed. The king consulted numerous physicians, but none was able to cure the boy. Some time later a physician arrived from a distant land, and after examining the boy he declared that he could cure him by making him wear the shirt of a happy man. The king therefore sent his servants to some wealthy property owners, the richest of the rich, for surely they were happy. However they told the king’s servants that they weren’t actually happy, for they had many worries and their business affairs added a great deal of stress to their lives. The king’s servants then visited some business owners, but they gave the same response. Finally the king’s servants met a shepherd, and they could see that he was truly happy. However when they asked him for his shirt, he said that he wasn’t wearing a shirt beneath his jacket! If he owned a shirt, he would need to clean it, and he would also need to care for it so it would last!

This parable teaches us that during Sukkot, we must completely leave our home and the wealth it contains in order to dwell in a sukkah, which has neither furniture nor creature comforts. In that case we will feel no stress and have no fear of being robbed, at which point our happiness will be real and complete.

Zusha’s Reply

During Sukkot, the tzaddik Rabbi Zusha of Anipoli Zatzal would usually invite simple and uneducated people into his sukkah, and there he would dine and rejoice with them. When Rabbi Zusha’s relatives asked him the reason for this custom, he said: “In the future, when the tzaddikim will be seated in the sukkah made from the skin of Leviathan, Zusha will also try to make his way inside. At that point he will be asked, ‘Zusha the uneducated, how can you possibly think that you deserve to sit among the tzaddikim?’ Zusha will then have his reply ready: ‘He too invited simple and uneducated people into his sukkah.’ ” – Derashot La-Moadim

The Lulav on the Right and the Etrog on the Left

The Gemara cites Rava as saying: “The lulav in the right hand and the etrog in the left. What is the reason? The former constitutes three mitzvot 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 it hints at

As the Deer Longs for Water

the perfect Torah scholar, the most accomplished one among us. It would therefore seem appropriate for the etrog to be held in the right hand. The Gemara answers by saying that taking the lulav comprises three mitzvot (the lulav, myrtle, and willow), whereas taking the etrog comprises only one. Hence the former takes precedence. In alluding to the perfect Torah scholar, one who possesses the greatest character traits, the Gemara is telling us that if he fails to draw to himself the simple among the people, those who resemble myrtles and willows (meaning that he fails to teach them Torah), then despite the fact that he is great, the small lulav is even greater.

– Kol Yehuda

Our Eyes Saw No Sleep

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanania said, “When we rejoiced at the place of the water-drawing, our eyes saw no sleep” (Sukkah 53a).

How is it possible for eyes to see sleep? This means that they were not idle, for doing nothing is tantamount to sleeping. Being idle is therefore like sleeping with one’s eyes open. They, however, were occupied with the service of Hashem, not being idle for even an instant.

– Chatam Sofer

Annuling the Curses

The total number of sacrifices that we make during the festival of Sukkot is 98. Rashi writes that they come to annul the 98 curses mentioned in Sefer Devarim. However we need to understand why this correction takes place precisely on the festival of Sukkot. We know that all the curses result from a lack of joy in serving Hashem, as it is written in the passage of the admonishments: “Because you did not serve Hashem your G-d amid joy and goodness of heart” (Devarim 28:47). Hence on the festival of Sukkot, when we serve Hashem amid joy, these mitzvot have the power to annul the 98 curses of the Torah.

Serving Hashem Throughout the Year

It is written, “You shall take to yourselves on the first day the fruit of a hadar tree” (Vayikra 23:40).

This fruit refers to the etrog, which remains on a tree throughout the year. The book Vayakhel Moshe cites a beautiful parable from the Maharik: As soon as Shemini Atzeret arrives, there are some people who forget all the promises they made to Hashem and themselves during the month of Tishri. To them the author of Hatzlacha applies 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 until the following Rosh Hashanah, there is no trace of integrity in them. Yet those who walk in their innocence remain on the right path throughout the year. We know that the four species represent the four kinds of Jews:

The willow has neither taste nor fragrance, like those who neither perform mitzvot nor study Torah.

The myrtle has no taste but does have fragrance, like those who fail to perform mitzvot but do study Torah.

The lulav (palm branch) has taste but no fragrance, like those who perform mitzvot but do not study Torah.

The etrog has both taste and fragrance, like those who perform mitzvot and study Torah.

As a result, says the Torah, “You shall take to yourselves” – what path must you take? – “the fruit of a hadar tree,” which remains on a tree throughout the year. That is, we are not to practice mitzvot solely during the month of Tishri, but throughout the year. Since the etrog stays on a tree all year round, let us also stay on a “tree” throughout the year. As we know, this tree is the Torah, “A tree of life to those who lay hold of her” (Mishlei 3:18).

We recite certain psalms on Arvit and Shacharit during the festival of Sukkot, including Tehillim 42 (“For the Conductor, a Maskil, by the sons of Korach. As the deer longs for water”) and Tehillim 43 (“Avenge me, O G-d”). The book Tuvcha Yabiu (Vol. 1) gives a marvelous explanation for the expression, “As the deer longs for water.”

Rabbi Chaim of Sanz Zatzal never gave his endorsement for Torah books. Writers in his time would implore him for it, but he always refused. Rabbi Chaim gave only one enthusiastic endorsement for a book that he came across. It concerned an explanation on a difficult saying of the Sages, and of its author Rabbi Chaim said: “If he was not a man completely devoted to Hashem, he would have been unable to conceive of such an explanation.” This quote is cited in the book Leket Amarim, which recounts that Rabbi Chaim asked someone to bring him this book to study. As it turned out, he came across a passage in which the author examines the expression ke’ayal ta’arog (“as the deer longs”). Here the first Hebrew word is masculine, while the second is feminine. The author cites a difficulty raised by the commentators, namely why these words are not both feminine or masculine. That is, why does the expression mix both genders? To answer this, the author cites a passage in the Talmud stating that a deer’s womb is narrow (Bava Batra 16b). When it is about to give birth, the deer cries out 70 times, the same number of words contained in Tehillim 20 (“May Hashem answer you on the day of distress”). The Holy One, blessed be He, then sends a serpent to the deer, which bites it at the opening of its womb. The result is that the deer’s womb tears and becomes larger, and thus its offspring emerges. This is why Hashem asked Job, “Do you know the time when the mountain goats give birth, or anticipate the labor pains of the deer?” (Job 39:1). Hashem watches over and protects a deer when it is about to give birth. The Sages also say that a deer is compassionate and filled with mercy, and when a drought occurs, all the animals approach it so it can raise its eyes to Heaven and plead for mercy (Midrash Tehillim 22). It then cries out to Hashem, asking Him to send water so all the animals can quench their thirst. The author of this book asks what would happen if both things happened at once: If the deer was about to give birth and it was approached by the other animals to pray for rain. What would the deer do first?

The author states that in such a case, the deer would forget its own suffering and make itself into an ayal (a male deer), meaning that it would not give birth in order to pray for the other animals. This is why the expression uses both masculine and feminine terms. When Rabbi Chaim of Sanz read this explanation, it amazed him so much that he gave his endorsement to the book.

Guard Your Tongue

Don’t Go Overboard!

We often encounter a problem that requires the greatest prudence, which is to provide information about a person because someone wants to hire him, go into business with him, and so on. It is obvious that we can only state the truth in such cases. However we must limit our responses to the person in question; we cannot go overboard and start speaking about his family or friends. Since he is the person about whom questions are being asked, we must limit our responses to him alone. We must also limit our responses to the issue at hand, for we cannot say other things about this person if they are not relevant to the issue. We must be extremely careful with regards to such requests. We cannot exaggerate or betray even the slightest trace of bias about the person in question, nor can we say things out of context! – BeShaarei HaLashon

In the Light of the Haftarah

Erroneous Beliefs

It is written, "It shall be that all who remain from all the nations that had invaded Jerusalem will come up every year to worship the King, Hashem of hosts, and to celebrate the festival of Sukkot" (Zechariah 14:16).

Our Sages have said, "The nations will then plead: 'Offer us the Torah anew and we shall obey it.' But the Holy One, blessed be He, will say to them, 'You foolish ones among the peoples, he who takes the trouble [to prepare] on the eve of Shabbat can eat on Shabbat. But he who did not take the trouble [to prepare] on the eve of Shabbat, what shall he eat on Shabbat? Nevertheless, I have an easy mitzvah that is called sukkah. Go and carry it out.' ... Each of them will then go and make a sukkah on the top of his roof. But the Holy One, blessed be He, will cause the sun to blaze forth over them as at the summer solstice, and each of them will trample down his sukkah and leave" (Avodah Zarah 3a).

This requires an explanation, for the nations on their own asked Hashem to give them a mitzvah they could perform. Therefore why, when they failed to perform this mitzvah, were they not upset? On the contrary, they literally trampled upon the mitzvah they were given! The Talmud answers this question by citing the verse, "Let us cut their cords and let us cast off their ropes from ourselves" (Tehillim 2:3). This means that the nations thought of Hashem's commandment as being a rope that was tied around their neck and meant to shackle them. They failed to understand that fulfilling Hashem's mitzvah brings great benefits and honor to man, for they erroneously believed it to be just a heavy responsibility that weighed them down. The truth is that there is no greater joy for a person than to be among the servants of Hashem. That is what constitutes true good in this world and in the World to Come, to rejoice in His presence through His mitzvot and His Torah. – Torat HaParasha

The Deeds of the Great

The Benefits of Giving Charity

A certain man had two sons, one of whom practiced charity while the other gave nothing to charity. The one who practiced charity sold his house and all that he had and spent the proceeds on charity. One time on Hoshana Rabba, his wife gave him ten coins and told him: "Go and buy something for your children at the market." No sooner had he gone out than the charity collectors met him. ... He took the ten coins and gave them to the men. Being ashamed to return home, he went to synagogue. There he saw some of the etrogim that children throw about on Hoshana Rabba. ... So he took the etrogim from them, filled a sack with them, and set out on a voyage upon the Great Sea in order to reach the king's province. When he arrived, it happened that the king felt a pain in his bowels and was told in a dream: "This is your cure: Eat the etrogim which the Jews use in their prayers on Hoshana Rabba, and you will be healed." Thus they searched every ship and every province, but found none. They went and found this man sitting on his sack. "Have you anything with you?" they asked him. "I'm a poor man," he replied, "and have nothing to sell." They rummaged through his sack and found some etrogim. "Where are these from?" they asked. He told them that they were what Jews use in their prayers on Hoshana Rabba. They took the sack and brought it to the king, who ate the etrogim and was cured. They emptied the sack and filled it with denarii. The king said to him: "Ask any other favor and I shall grant it to you." He said, "I beg that my property be returned to me and that all the people shall come out to meet me." This was done for him. When he arrived in his home province, a herald preceded him as all the people came out to meet him. His brother also came out with his children to meet him. Yet as they were crossing a river, the current carried them off. Thus he entered his house and inherited his brother's property. – Vayikra Rabba 37:2

Your Eyes Shall Behold Your Teacher

Rabbi Meshulam Igra of Pressburg and Tismentitz

The gaon Rabbi Meshulam Igra Zatzal was born in Butzatz in 5512. He was a descendant of the gaon Rabbi Yehoshua Hershel (the author of Meginei Shlomo), and this lineage could clearly be seen in him. In fact at the age of nine, the young Meshulam gave an impressive lecture at the great synagogue in Brody, which as we know was filled with Torah scholars and sages. The Rav of Brody, Rabbi Itzikel Hamburger, was amazed by the words of this boy, who would eventually become his son-in-law.

At the age of 17, Rabbi Meshulam was named as the Rav and Av Beit Din of Tismentitz. From that time on, hundreds of students went to learn the Torah from his mouth. From Tismentitz, Rabbi Meshulam became the Av Beit Din of Pressburg, where he remained for 10 years. At that point he was known throughout the religious world for his immense abilities in Torah, and many Torah geniuses of his generation had to work hard just to understand his words. Rabbi Meshulam conducted himself with holiness and purity, immersing himself in a mikveh each day and fervently praying in a loud voice. He lived a life of great austerity, eating fish and meat only on Shabbat, and never eating a complete meal unless it was part of a mitzvah celebration. He was completely immersed in studying the holy Torah and praying in holiness and purity. The great Torah figures of his generation praised him immensely, with the gaon Rabbi Yaakov of Lisa saying that praising Rabbi Meshulam was like praising Rabbeinu Tam. In his eulogy for Rabbi Meshulam, the Chatam Sofer said: "His hands were like two Torah scrolls, and it is utterly impossible to grasp the magnitude of his understanding and the speed and acuity of his mind."

On Tishri 18, 5562, aged just 50 years, Rabbi Meshulam Igra's soul ascended to the celestial academy, and his body was laid to rest in Pressburg. Published from his manuscripts are Responsa of Rabbeinu Meshulam Igra and Sefer Igra Rama on the Talmud.

Real Life Stories

The Connection Between Dwelling in a Sukkah and Showing Hospitality

During one of the days of Sukkot, an out-of-town guest found himself at the home of Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski. After they spoke a little, the gaon invited him to eat in his sukkah: "Please go down to the yard and eat a relaxing meal in the sukkah. Unfortunately, I'm obligated to stay in the house because I'm sick, and the mitzvah of dwelling in a sukkah doesn't apply to me."

The man accepted the Rav's invitation, and the members of Rabbi Chaim Ozer's household presented him with a full-course meal in the sukkah, as they usually did for all their guests. At that point the gaon suddenly appeared at the entrance of the sukkah. The man said to him, "But Rabbi, you're ill! Why did you go to the trouble of coming down here?" Rabbi Chaim Ozer replied, "It's true that I'm ill, and according to the din I'm not obligated to dwell in a sukkah. However I gave it some thought, and although I'm exempt from the mitzvah of dwelling in a sukkah, I don't have the right to exempt myself from the mitzvah of showing hospitality, for even Abraham did this when he was ill. That being the case, I decided to join you as you eat your meal. It's not right for you to sit all alone in a sukkah while I stay in the house, for that's not the way to treat a guest on Sukkot!"

– Parperaot LaTorah