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Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

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Sukkot 5772



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Mrs. Sally Mayer • Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger
Rabbi Zvi Sinensky • Rabbi Netanel Wiederblank





Dear Friends,

It is my sincere hope that the Torah found in this virtual ספר may serve to enhance your יום טוב (holiday) and your לימוד (study).

We have designed this project not only for the individual, studying alone, but perhaps even more for a חברותא (a pair studying together) that wish to work through the study matter together, or a group engaged in facilitated study.

With this material, we invite you to join our Beit Midrash, wherever you may be, תורה להגדיל (to increase and enjoy the splendor of Torah) and to engage in discussing issues that touch on a most contemporary matter, and are rooted in the timeless arguments of our great sages from throughout the generations.

Chag Sameiach,

Rabbi Kenneth Brander

The David Mitzner Dean, Yeshiva University
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Symbolism on Sukkot

Rabbi Kenneth Auman

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Nissuch Hamayim – The Water Libation

Succot is unique among all the *yamim tovim* in that it featured water libations on the altar in the *Bet Hamikdash* each and every day of the holiday. This practice is not mentioned in the Torah, but is a *Halacha Lemoshe Misinai*, an oral tradition handed down generation after generation from Moses who received it at Sinai. The tradition does not present any rationale or explanation for the practice, and I offer the following symbolic *Chassidic* explanation for your consideration.

When a gift is given, the recipient can appreciate it in one of two ways. He may be grateful because of the nature of the gift itself – i.e. something important or something valuable – or he may be appreciative because of the identity of the person who gave the gift. Thus if a great, famous, or beloved person gives something of relatively little value, it will still be treasured - not due to the nature of the item, but rather because of who gave it.

Gd requested the water offering from us. Water is not a valuable item. Therefore it is obvious that Gd wishes it not because of the nature of the item, but rather because of who is giving it – the Jewish nation. So when we bring the water as a gift to Gd, at His request, that is an indication of **our** importance – that He treasures gifts from the Jewish nation even when they are of little value. This highlights the importance of *Klal Yisrael*.

But why specifically on *Succot*, and not on any other holiday? May I suggest that it is due to the proximity of *Succot* to the *Yamim Noraim*. During the *Yamim Noraim* period we took stock of our lives. If indeed we were honest with ourselves, we realized our many shortcomings. Recognizing shortcomings is not a pleasant task at all. It could very well lead to depression or sadness. And since everyone ought to be engaged in this process of introspection during the *Yamim Noraim*, we could all emerge from it in a collective state of depression as we realize and acknowledge our many failings.

Therefore God says to us, “Make a *yom tov*. As individuals you may have flaws, but together, as a nation you are the best. I treasure you and appreciate gifts from you even if they are of little monetary value because they come from you, my treasured nation.

Thus *Succot* is *zman simchatenu*...

Consider though, that on the very same altar that the water is poured over the holiday of *Succot*, seventy bulls were offered on behalf of the seventy nations of the world. This teaches us an important caveat to the lesson of Gd’s love for us. The fact that we are being told that we are great should not be taken as a denigration of anyone else. All nations are worthy of respect if they behave in a morally proper manner.

The Succah

We think of *galut* as being less than ideal, of being a punishment ... מפני הטאנו גלינו מארצנו. The ideal state is to be in *Eretz Yisrael*, sovereign in our own land, rather than being in *galut*.

So too with the other form of exile mentioned in the Torah, that of the accidental murderer who must exile himself to a city of refuge – *Ir miklat*. The ideal situation would be for him to be at home, yet his accidental crime requires this punishment.

But we, on this holiday, are experiencing another type of *galut* – the *galut* of the *succah*.

Leave your permanent home and dwell in a temporary one.

Succah 2b

צא מדירת קבע ושב בדירת ארעי
טובה ב:

This kind of *galut* is not a punishment at all; to the contrary, it leads us to the state of joy of ושמחת בהגידך.

I would suggest that there are three differences between our *galut* on *Succot*, and the two previously mentioned ones.

1. With regard to the first two, we are propelled into *galut* against our wishes. On *Succot*, our journey to the *succah* is voluntary, taken to fulfill Gd's command. That itself causes joy.
2. With regard to the first two, we are taken away from something we like, and placed in a less desirable situation. Here, we are entering a place more holy than what we're leaving, the צילא דמהימנותא, the presence of Gd.
3. With the other two, we are taken away from that which is important to us. Here we are stating that our material possessions are not that important, that a meaningful life is more important. So this *galut* should serve to influence us even when we leave it...

Etrog

In our society we are far removed from many aspects of nature that were taken for granted by previous generations. The entire cycle of planting and harvesting is something that means very little to us. Certain symbolism that might have been evident to generations of yore, is often lost on us. An example of this is the *Midrashic* comment describing the *etrog*.

We read ... פרי עץ הדר, "And you shall take on the first day (of Succot) a beautiful fruit of a tree (or alternatively, the fruit of a beautiful tree)."

The *Merash* () attempts to explain the special characteristics of the *etrog* based on this verse.

Pri etz hadar - R' Chiyah taught, [this refers to] a tree whose fruit and wood taste the same, which is an etrog. Hadar - Ben Azai says [this refers to a fruit that] stays [dar] on its tree from one year to the next.

Vayikra Rabbah 30:8

פרי עץ הדר תני ר' חייא עץ
שטעם עצו ופריו שוה זה
אתרוג. הדר בן עזאי אמר
הדר באילנו משנה לשנה.
ויקרא רבה ל:ח

R. Chiyah, basing himself on the fact that the word for fruit and tree are together, posits that the uniqueness of the etrog is that both the fruit and the tree itself have the same taste.

Ben Azzai, in a play on the word "*haddar*," beautiful, reads it as "one who dwells." He is emphasizing the notion that the *etrog*, unique among fruits can remain on the tree for many seasons.

Both of these characteristics, the similarity of taste of the fruit and the tree, and the staying power of the etrog, imply consistency.

But they have different nuances with regard to consistency: The similarity of taste implies that the tree produces what it itself has. No hypocrisy, no double standard, but rather תוכו כבירו, what you see is what you get.

Therefore when we stand holding the *etrog* and praising Gd, we are stating that these praises are not just being uttered by our lips, but they are the true "fruit" of our hearts, they represent our innermost feelings and emotions.

The fact that the *etrog* can remain on the tree for many seasons, speaks to the ability of the etrog to withstand all different vagaries of weather. Therefore, when we stand holding the *etrog*, and praising Gd, we are stating that our praises are long lasting, and come from our hearts no matter what "weather" we are experiencing. Whether we are the recipients of good things or whether we experience adverse conditions, our faith and praise of Gd does not waver ...

Ushpizzin

The word *Ushpizzin* means guests, and we know that it has a special connotation to *Succot*. The idea that each night of *Succot* we host in our *Succah* a distinguished guest from the past is not mentioned in the *Gemarah* or *poskim*, and comes to us through the *Zohar*.

But what is its significance? Some understand it as encouragement to invite the poor to one's *succah*, and that having "real" guests will invoke the approval of these great individuals from the past. But it is difficult to see the connection. (Also, then why not have *Ushpizzin* on *Pessach* as well, when we are also encouraged to invite the poor?)

We know that the *succah* commemorates the עֲנֵי הַכְּבוֹד in the desert. But the *succah* is more than mere commemoration. It is reenactment. What Williamsburg Virginia is to American culture, *lehavdil*, the *Succah* is for us. Just as when one visits Williamsburg (Va.) one is stepping into the past, so too, when we enter the *Succah* we are figuratively stepping into the past, and one again experiencing our ancestors' stay in the desert.

So when we leave our homes and enter the *succah*, we are leaving the 21st century and going back thousands of years. Therefore, all the great people from the past can enter our *succah* as well, and all of Jewish existence becomes merged into one ...

One might therefore say that the ארבע מינים represent Jewish unity in the present, and the *Succah* represents Jewish unity with the past. (This might explain the custom of the Ari to *bench lulav* in the *succah*).

Bringing the Succah into our Homes

Rabbi Josh Blass

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One of the defining characteristics of the experience of a life of mitzvah observance is the fact that at every stage of a person's natural and religious development, one is able to glean different levels of meaning and nuance. This is one of the explanations of the expression *Toras HaShem Temimah*, the Torah is complete because it allows access from the youngest to oldest, from the most learned and sophisticated to the individual who is opening the Chumash for the first time.

One of the many *mitzvos* that reflects these multiple layers of access to the Torah is the commandment to sit in the succah. The Gemara in *Succah* 11b records the famous dispute between R' Akiva and R' Eliezer as to what exactly the holiday of Succos commemorates. R' Eliezer believes that our sitting in the Succah memorializes the *ananei hakavod*, the clouds of glory, while R' Akiva avers that the commandment to sit in the Succah recalls and commemorates the *succos mamash*, the actual booths that *Bnai Yisroel* built and sat in during their sojourns through the desert.¹

Although at first glance, this debate between R' Akiva and R' Eliezer appears to be solely theoretical and in no way normative, this in fact is not the case. The *Tur* in *Orach Chaim Siman* 625 deviates from his normal approach of just codifying halachic rules and discusses the conceptual link between sitting in the succah and the necessary belief in the Exodus and in God's existence that must emanate from the experience of sitting in the succah. The *Bach* comments that this deviation is due to the fact that the Torah goes out of its way to introduce an element of understanding and intent into the mitzva when it states in Vayikra 23:42 "*Lmaan yeidu doroseichem ki b'succos hoshavti es bnai yisroel* - so you shall know for generations that I housed the *Bnai Yisrael* in succos." According to the *Bach*, only if a person knows the essence of what the succah is and has intent to properly fulfill the mitzvah is the sitting in the succah considered a meaningful act. If that is the case, then the debate is far from theoretical, as our ability to correctly fulfill the mitzvah of sitting in the succah is contingent on a full understanding of the basis of the obligation.

Both the position of R' Eliezer and of R' Akiva have come under attack from the *Acharonim* and to a lesser degree from the *Rishonim*. There is a school of thought among the *Acharonim* who

¹ Interestingly, the text of the *Mechilta* and the *Sifra* is the reverse, namely that R' Akiva holds *ananei kavod* while R' Eliezer supports the position of *succos mamash*. See the Maharatz Chayas who supports the version of our Gemara based on the Gemara in *Megilla* 3b.

question, according to R' Eliezer, why the miraculous presence of the *ananei kavod* warrant a holiday in and of itself, as opposed to other revealed miracles like the manna or the well, for which no Yom Tov is celebrated.²

The more prominent question is posed according to the opinion of R' Akiva. For each of the *chagim* we clearly understand the miraculous nature of the *chag* and we can clearly comprehend the national transformation that the *chag* represents. If, in fact, R' Akiva's position is accurate and Succos is a commemoration of the man-made booths built in the desert, why does it justify a *chag*? What precisely is being celebrated, that during *Bnai Yisroel's* sojourn in the desert they built protective huts? That, in and of itself, hardly seems worthy of a full blown Biblically mandated celebration. There are those who believe that it is precisely because of the strength of this question that R' Eliezer took the position of *ananei hakavod* and others who claim that Rashi and the *Tur*, who normally follow the opinion of R' Akiva, went against form and rule according to R' Eliezer.³

All of this begs the original question of what in fact is being commemorated when one sits in the Succah? The *Korban Aharon* in his commentary to the *Toras Kohanim* connects the greatness of the succah with the conclusion of the rest of the *pasuk* in Vayikra 23:43 which states "*b'hotzi' osam mei' eretz mitzraim- you were placed in succos when I took you out of Egypt.*" The very fact that a nation, presumably terrified after their ordeal in leaving Egypt, would still possess enough faith to camp out in the desert in flimsy booths is a fundamental statement of the extraordinary faith that was the hallmark of *Bnai Yisroel* at that point in history.⁴

I believe that there is another approach to this question, one that is perhaps alluded to in the commentary of the Rabbeinu B'Chai in the aforementioned *pasuk*. Many of the commentators explain that Succos is a reflection of, and is parallel to, the building of the Mishkan and the future building of the Beis HaMikdash. The Vilna Gaon in his *siddur*, the *Siach Yitzchak*, felt that the words '*V'ratzisa banu*' in the *tefilla* of *atah bchartanu* in the Yom Tov Amida is an allusion to the Ribbono Shel Olam forgiving the nation following the *Chait HaEgel*. Once that forgiveness was procured, said the GR"A, then the stage was set for the building of the Mishkan which is represented on a yearly basis by the building of the succah.⁵ Clearly the parallel between the succah and the Mishkan/ Beis haMikdash informs the *Harachaman* that is included in *Birchas HaMazon* as well as the *tefilla* said in the succah on Shmini Atzeres. Additionally, many commentators believe that it is this connection between Succos and forgiveness/ Mishkan that generates the unique Biblical obligation for *simcha* on Succos.⁶

² See the Mabit in the *Beis Elokim Sha'ar Hayesodos Perek 37*, Maharal in the *Gur Aryeh*, as well as the *Bach* in *Siman 625* who provide various answers to this question.

³ For more on resolving the proper *psak* in the dispute between R' Akiva and R'Eliezer, see the *Chayei Adam Klal 146*, the *Levush Siman 625*, the *Netziv* in *HaEmek Davar Bamidbar 10:34* and the *Chassam Sofer* in the *Toras Moshe Vayikra 23:43*.

⁴ For a novel approach to this question see the *Rokeiach* in *Siman 219*. Also see the *Rashbam* in *VaYikra*.

⁵ This point is made explicitly throughout the writings of the Vilna Gaon and Maharal. See the Vilna Gaon in the *Aderes Eliyahu Parshas Balak* and the Maharal at the end of his *drasha* to *Shabbos HaGadol*.

⁶ See *Ritva Succah 53a* as well as the *Shem MeShmuel* in several places.

How does one understand this deep connection between Succos and the Mishkan? On a simple level, the interplay between these themes seems to support R' Eliezer, namely that the succah represents the concentration of the Ribbono Shel Olam's presence manifested in the *ananei kavod*. Seemingly, the motif of the Mishkan as well was the intensification of God's presence in the world and more specifically in one place of the world.⁷ Perhaps both the Mishkan and Succah represents God's quality of *chesed* as he is *metzamzem* Himself into the physical universe.

That being said, one can make a case that the theme of the Mishkan, and by extension the Succah, highlights the other side of the God/ man relationship. Throughout the exodus, *Bnei Yisroel* had become accustomed to, and dependent on, the miraculous. Beginning with Moshe's appearance in front of Pharaoh through the blasts heard at Har Sinai, every step was infused with the miraculous and supernatural. In a very real sense, the sin of the Golden Calf represented a nation's reliance on exceptional and unnatural religious forces.⁸ The commandment to build a Mishkan was a response to this national personality, namely to build a religious home, a *bayis*, a place in which service becomes normalized and regulated. According to many commentators, the Mishkan's most fundamental and essential feature was the *korban tamid* which represented the necessary discipline and consistency of a religious life. The prohibition of *bamos*, private altars, was a statement of taking one's personal religious home and integrating that into the Mishkan as the new the communal home.⁹ The focus of the Mishkan is not necessarily on the one dimension, the one direction, of God descending to a nation, but rather speaks to man's ability to create and build places and structures that are worthy, through human initiative, to house the *Shechinas HaShem*.

It is this that is celebrated and commemorated through the building and dwelling in the succah. Not just the dimension of the miraculous, transcendent *ananei kavod*, but the remembrance of a nation, who having tasted freedom, chose to build tents infused with the spirit of the Mishkan, the spirit of *mah tovu ohalecha Yaakov*. Thousands of years later, the paradigm of that tent should still inspire our experience in the succah. Let's make the experience of sitting in the succah an opportunity, one that we might only be able to sustain for a week, of creating a home overflowing with the spirit of sanctity and serenity. Through the merit of building and dwelling in the succah that reflects the essence of the Mishkan we should collectively all merit to return to Yerushalayim next year, experiencing Succos in the shadow of the rebuilt Bais HaMikdash.

⁷ HKB'H telling Moshe to stand outside of the Mishkan during the *Hashraas Hashechinah* would certainly speak to this approach; see Rav Neventzal shlit"a at the end of Shmos for more on this topic.

⁸ See the *Kuzari* 1:97 for a somewhat different formulation.

⁹ R' Elazar HaKalir alludes to this concept in the *Kinno*s when he describes the Mishkan as *ohali*- my tent

All You Need is Love

Rabbi Reuven Brand

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The *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch* are two strictly legal codes that record Jewish law. It is highly unusual, therefore, to find philosophical meaning or rational explanations for *mitzvot* in their pages. However, in *Hilchot Sukkah*, both works record the reason for the mitzvah of Sukkah:

In Sukkot you shall dwell for seven days ... for I had Bnei Yisrael dwell in Sukkot' - these are the clouds of glory that surrounded them to protect them from the heat and sun.

Shulchan Aruch O.C. 625:1

בסוכות תשבו שבעת ימים וגו' כי בסוכות
הושבתי את בני ישראל הם ענני כבוד
שהקיפם בהם לבל יכם שרב ושמש
שולחן ערוך או"ח הלכות סוכה תרכה:א

In his commentary to the *Tur* (O.C. 625), the *Bach* (Rabbi Yoel Sirkis, Poland, 1561- 1640) suggests that regarding the mitzvah of Sukkah, the imperative to recall the message of the Sukkah is itself part of the legal requirements of the law. One does not fulfill their obligation in its entirety without remembering the reason why we sit in the Sukkah. We can understand this in light of the view that is cited, the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer, which maintains that the Sukkah commemorates the miracle of the clouds of glory, the *ananei hakavod*. The wonder of the heavenly clouds was a miraculous Divine phenomenon that warrants remembrance as a part of the mitzvah. Yet, Rabbi Akiva suggests a different interpretation as to the commemoration of the Sukkah:

'For in Sukkot I had the Bnei Yisrael dwell', these refer to the clouds of glory, says Rabbi Eliezer. Rabbi Akiva says these were actual huts that were made for them.

Sukkah 11b

דנניא (ויקרא כג) כי בסוכות הושבתי את בני
ישראל - ענני כבוד היו, דברי רבי אליעזר.
רבי עקיבא אומר סוכות ממש עשו להם
סוכה יא:

According to this second opinion, we commemorate the actual Sukkot in which the Jews lived in the desert after leaving Egypt. What was so significant that we should remember these desert huts, a reminder which is part and parcel of the mitzvah itself?

Let us raise another issue. One of the salient halachic features of the mitzvah of Sukkah is the principle of *teishvu kein taduru*. This means that we must dwell in our Sukkah in the same manner that we dwell in our homes. This concept animates many of our practices regarding the Sukkah, guiding us to view the Sukkah as our principal dwelling. Hence, we derive laws regarding spending time in the Sukkah, how we decorate our Sukkah, when we are not required to be in our Sukkah, etc. from the concept of *teishvu kein taduru*. It is, therefore, interesting to note that although we are required to dwell in our Sukkah as we would in our home, we may not build the Sukkah as our home.

There is an ongoing dispute between Rabbi Yehuda and the rabbis regarding the nature of the structure of the Sukkah (*Yoma 10b, Sukkah 2a*). Rabbi Yehuda requires that the Sukkah be a

dirat keva - a permanent structure. However, the rabbis rule that the Sukkah must be a *dirat aray*- a temporary structure. It must be tenuous by definition, and this is the accepted opinion in halacha. Hence, a Sukkah whose roof is above 20 *amot* is unacceptable because it is considered a permanent dwelling (*Shulchan Aruch* 633, *Magen Avraham*). How do we understand these two seemingly contradictory concepts of תדורו כעין תדורו - to live in the Sukkah as we live in our home and our insistence that the Sukkah must be a דירת עראי - a tenuous dwelling unlike our home? Is this not a paradox?

Perhaps we can shed light on this issue by considering the *megillah* that we read during Sukkot, the book of Kohelet. At first glance, the book of Kohelet does not seem appropriate for the holiday of Sukkot. We ascribe the appellation זמן שמחתנו - the time of joy- to the holiday of Sukkot throughout the Yom Tov. It is quite curious, then, that we read Kohelet, with its dour prescription during our holiday of joy. Its abjectly depressing tone – הכל הכל הבל (all is futile) seems to negate joy and almost all else in our world. Avudraham (Rabbi David ben Yosef Avudraham, Spain, 14th c.) offers two approaches to this question:

On Shemini Atzeret, it is customary to read Kohelet because [the rabbis commented on the verse (11:2)] "Divide a portion into seven, and even into eight for you don't know what troubles shall be upon the earth that this refers to the seven days of Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret ... There is another reason and that is that Shlomo said these words on Sukkot as it states (Devarim 31:10) on the holiday [at the conclusion] of the shemita year, on Sukkot, when the Jewish people come to be seen, gather the nation, the men, women and children, etc. and it states (Melachim I 8:2) they all gathered to King Shlomo during the month of Etanim, on Sukkot, etc. and it was then that he recited [Kohelet] during hakhel in order to rebuke the Jewish people. For this reason, it is logical to recite it on Sukkot. This is from the writings of Ibn HaYarchi.

Sefer Abudraham, Tefillot HaPesach

וגם בשמיני חג העצרת נהגו לקרות קהלת מפני שכתוב בו תן חלק לשבעה וגם לשמונה אלו שבעת ימי החג ושמיני חג העצרת, ר"ל לפי שהוא חג האסיף להזייר על תרומות ומעשרות ונרדים שלא לעבור עליהם בבל תאחר בשלש רגלים. ועוד טעם אחר כי שלמ"ה בחג אמרו בהקהל כמו שכתוב (דב' לא, י) במועד שנת השמיטה בחג הסוכות בבא כל ישראל לראות וגו' הקהל את העם האנשים והנשים והטף וגו' וכתוב ויקהלו אל המלך שלמה בירח האתנים בחג וגו' ואז אמרו בהקהל להוכיח את ישראל על כן יתכן לאומרו בחג כל זה כתב אבן הירח.

ספר אבודרהם תפלות הפסח

His first suggestion is a technical one, while his second is a didactic one. In order to ensure that our joy during this season doesn't become excessive and inappropriate, we temper it with the sobering message of Kohelet.

Perhaps we can offer an alternative explanation. The Sfat Emet (Rabbi Yehuda Leib Alter, Poland, 1847- 1905) teaches that Sukkot is the culmination of our *teshuva* process, an effort comprised of two phases. Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, the days of awe, reflect the stage of *teshuva meyirah*, return to Hashem out of fear of punishment. There is, however, a more lofty stage which follows, known as *teshuva meahavah*. This is a return to Hashem simply because we desire to be connected with Him, to be a part of His mission, irrespective of its implications for us as individuals. This is the most exalted level of return, as is it an expression of pure love of

Hashem. The *Sfat Emet* explains that Sukkot is an expression of this level of *teshuva meahava*; it manifests our love for Hashem.

Now we can appreciate the message and context of Megillat Kohelet. Imagine a newly engaged couple, head over heels in love with each other. Often times, they seem to exist in an alternate reality. They focus solely on their relationship and are often oblivious to their surroundings, in particular, to their physical needs. Their usual insistence on certain number of hours of sleep, the cleanliness of their living quarters or even their normal diet are abandoned in this time of love. When two individuals are in love, the focus of their lives shifts to each other, and the mundane aspects of life fall to the wayside. The Talmud illustrates this with a saying:

Somene used to say, 'when the love is strong, we could sleep on the width of a knife. Now that the love is weak, a bed of sixty garmidin does not suffice for us.'

Sanhedrin 7a

ההוא דהוה קאמר ואזיל כי רחימתין הוה עזיזא
אפוטיא דספסירא שכיבן השתא דלא עזיזא
רחימתין פוריא בר שיתין גרמידי לא סגי לן.
סנהדרין ז.

Hence, our ideal experience of Sukkot is one which is infused with a complete *teshuva meahava*, a love for Hashem that is so focused and single-minded, that little else matters. In a world in which one is truly in love with the Divine, then the temporal world in which the physical exists is truly nothingness, as Kohelet teaches. In this light, the message of Kohelet complements our experience of Sukkot.

It is therefore, most fitting that on this holiday of passionate, spiritual aspirations we put the physical world aside. We live in the Sukkah full time- תשובו כעין תדורו - so that we can spend every moment with our Beloved, basking in His shade. All the while, the physical environment remains temporary by design, as, to those who are truly in love with Hashem, the walls and roof do not matter.

Perhaps this is the intent of Rabbi Akiva, who suggests that the Sukkot commemorate the huts in which we lived in the desert. We recall our first expression of our love for Hashem in the desert as the prophet Yirmiyahu recounts:

Go forth and tell Yerushalayim, thus says the Lord, I remember the kindness of your youth, your complete love, that you went after me into the desert, in a barren land.

Yirmiyahu 2:2

ה'לך וקראת באזני ירושלם לאמר כה אמר ה'
זכרתי לך חסד נעורייך אהבת פלולתיך לכתך
אחרי במדבר בארץ לא זרועה:
ירמיהו ב:ב

We set aside our rational perspectives and physical needs to follow our Beloved into the barren desert to begin our national life together with Hashem. We lived in temporary shelters, Sukkot, for the worldly concerns of the time did not warrant our attention. The holiday of Sukkot reminds us of our love of Hashem during the first years of our relationship after the Exodus.

While this notion of *teshuva meahava* and loving Hashem are lofty and perhaps beyond reach for most of us, we can always appreciate these ideas and ideals. Perhaps, the inclusion of the message of the Sukkah in our legal code is to underscore for us the importance of our spiritual aspirations. While we may not have yet achieved the ultimate level of *teshuva meahava*, we keep this idea in the center of our Sukkot experience. Hopefully, with our attention to this exalted level, we will be inspired to grow closer to Hashem during this holiday in which we merit to rejoice in His love.

When Bar Kohkba Ordered *Lulavim* ...

The Second Jewish Revolt and the Miracle of the *Lulav*

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As a child growing up in San Diego, I marveled at the *lulavim* and *etrogim* that members of our community “imported” from Los Angeles each year. Few in number, the *lulav* was often quite dry, having been brought, I understood, all the way from Israel. Though I grew up with palm trees in my backyard, these brownish *lulavim* and golden *etrogim* were special, even majestic. My family, like most families, never owned our own *lulav* when I was young. Rather, the shuls brought in a few, and we all shared. This scarcity made the *lulav* feel all the more holy.

If this was the case in a small American community of the late 1960’s and 1970’s, the situation in most pre-War European communities was all the more extreme. A *lulav* and *etrog*, well beyond the means of most Jews, was imported from points south—and for the fortunate, from *Eretz Yisrael* itself. Often kept in a silver container (likely a sugar box with the word *etrog* inscribed carefully upon it), this fruit of redemption was treated with reverence, and even with numinous awe, by the Jews of the Diaspora. Arriving in Israel to learn in 1977, I was overtaken by the abundance of *lulavim* and *ethrogim*. The *shuq* was full of them—large, small, Yemenite and Chassidish. I remember selecting my *lulav* carefully (imagine, getting to choose!), living *halakhot* that until then had been strictly theoretical.¹⁰

Our national love of the *lulav* and *etrog*, identified as the *pri ets pri hadar*, “the fruit of the goodly tree” and by Targum Pseudo-Jonathan as the fruit of the tree of good and evil in the Garden of Eden, is expressed throughout *Hazal* and back to the Second Temple period. Judah the Maccabee rededicated the Temple in 164 BCE with a procession carrying palm fronds for his

¹⁰ For a fascinating reflection on transitions within Jewish communities during the latter twentieth century, focusing on larger “enclave” communities, see H. Soloveitchik, “Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy,” *Tradition* 28.4 (1994), posted at: www.lookstein.org/links/orthodoxy.htm

“Sukkot in the month of Kislev.”¹¹ In the Hellenistic world, the palm frond was a symbol for victory, a notion that Jews shared. This is expressed most prominently in the coins of the Second Revolt against Rome (132-135), led by Shimon son of Kosiba, apparently with the blessings of Rabbi Aqiva—who identified Shimon as the messianic “son of the star,” Bar Kokhba. The remains of this revolt are now plentiful, and include massive underground complexes throughout the Shephalah from which Bar Kosiba fought a guerilla war against the Roman legions. Within these complexes, and at numerous other sites in Judaea, thousands of bronze and silver coins have been discovered in numerous denominations that express Bar Kokhba’s intentions in the war. These were literally struck over Roman coins, the pagan imagery of which sometimes peeks through the quickly minted Jewish coins. The largest of the Bar Kokhba coins, the silver tetradrachm, bear the earliest image of the *Beit ha-*



Miqdash preserved, a four columned building (tetrapylon) typical of the Roman period (this is the image use for the famous model of the Temple now at the Israel Museum). Within its massive central portal, the *Shulkhan Lehem ha-Panim*, the Table for the Bread of the Presence, can be seen clearly. The inscription on the side, in ancient Jewish script, reads: “for the redemption of Zion.” The image on the reverse is connected to the one on the face. Here we see a *lulav*, the *hadasim* and *aravot* clearly visible and attached together with a kind of basket (of the kind still used by Ashkenazim), an *etrog* to the right. Bar Kokhba’s minters show us a Jewish palm frond promising victory and rededication of the Temple, even as it shows us a particularly beautiful ritual object of the sort that was taken up by Jews in their synagogues even in the absence of the Temple.

Among the first acts of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai in the wake of the Temple’s destruction was the *taqqanah* that the *lulav* was to be taken up in the *medinah*— in local communities-- not just for the first day of Sukkot, but for the entire seven days (*Mishnah Rosh ha-Shanah* 4:3). Ben Zakkai’s intention was to intensify Jewish interaction with an object that had previously been central to the Temple service, but secondary to the synagogues. From Yavneh on, the *lulav* was to become a central symbol of Jewish life even beyond the Temple, promising redemption and messianic restoration. Bar Kokhba took this notion quite seriously. He would bring redemption to *klal Yisrael* as messiah. We know this not only from his coins, but from a letter preserved in the arid Judean desert and discovered by Yigael Yadin in the Judean desert.¹² This Aramaic document ensures the procurement of *lulavim*, *etrogim*, *hadasim* and *aravot* even in time of war,

¹¹ 2 Maccabees, chapters 1, 10. For a historical introduction to Classical Jewish History, including the sources presented here, visit [Jewish and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World](http://cojs.org/cojswiki/Jews_and_Judaism_in_the_Greco-Roman_Period), ed. S. Fine, cojs.org/cojswiki/Jews_and_Judaism_in_the_Greco-Roman_Period

¹² This document was published in a popular format in Y. Yadin, *Bar Kokhba: The Rediscovery of the Legendary Hero of the Second Jewish Revolt Against Rome* (New York: Random House, 1971), 129. See cojs.org/cojswiki/The_Bar_Kokhba_Letters:_Day-to-Day_Conduct_of_the_Revolt

asking that one Yehuda son of Menashe, located at the still unidentified *Qiryat 'Arabayyah* in the Judaeen Desert, send transport to two other officers, located in Ein Gedi:

Shimon to Yehuda, son of Menashe at Qiryat 'Arabayyah:

I have sent you two donkeys [in order] that you send with them two men to Yehonatan son of Ba'yan and to Mesabala [in Ein Gedi, so] that they pack and send to the camp, to you, lulavin and etrogin.

And you are to send additional persons from your place and let them bring hadasin and aravin.

And prepare them [probably, "tithe them"] and deliver them to the camp, because the population [army?] is large.

Fare well (shelam)!

Lulavim were not just a symbol to be placed on a coin by Bar Kokhba, nor just a memory device to remind of the Temple, but a necessary procurement for his army at its encampment in time of war. The significance of the *lulav* and *etrog* was so great that Shimon himself saw to it that numerous sets were available to his troops. Was there enough for everyone? We cannot know. The letter provides that Yehuda son of Menashe send enough for two donkeys to carry, which was clearly quite a few!

The Bar Kokhba revolt ultimately failed, and Shimon son of Kosiba was reframed for ever more as the "son of Lies" (Bar Kozba). Nonetheless, what is striking in Bar Kokhba's Sukkot preparations is how similar they are to our own. Having grown up in an era not so long ago when *lulavim* were far from plentiful, I continually marvel and take note of this minor miracle each time I am surrounded by Jews with palm frond in one hand, a *siddur* in the other. Whether in once-distant San Diego, in New York, Yerushalayim or the most distant military base in *Medinat Yisrael*, *lulavim*, *etrogim*, *hadasim* and *aravot* now abound. It is no less of a miracle to behold as each of us raises up the *lulav* within our *minyanim* and with all of the generations before us--including, I might imagine, the soldiers of Bar Kokhba-- pronounce together, *ana ha-Shem hoshiya na*, "O Lord, redeem us"

Reading Kohelet on Sukkot

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There is a tradition to read the book of Kohelet, Ecclesiastes, on Sukkot. The origins of the tradition date back at least to the time of Rashi (1040-1105). Rashi's students write that one should recite Kohelet on Shabbat of Sukkot or on Shemini Atzeret:

On the Shabbat of Sukkot, we recite the entire Hallel, the full Kaddish, and the entire congregation reads the book of Kohelet while seated in order to give a portion to seven and also to eight.
Siddur Rashi, pp. 104-105

[On Shemini Atzeret] we recite the entire Hallel and read Kohelet if it was not already read.
Siddur Rashi, pg. 147

לשבת וסוכה גומרין את ההלל יתגדל
תקבל וקורין כל הציבור ספר קהלת
בישיבה, ליתן חלק לשבעה וגם
לשמונה.
סדור רש"י עמ' קד-קה
[בשמיני עצרת] גומרין הלל וקורין
קהלת אם עד[י]ן לא נקרא.
סדור רש"י עמ' קמז

According to Rashi, the reason for reading Kohelet on Sukkot is because it contains the verse:

Divide a portion into seven, and even into eight for you don't know what troubles shall be upon the earth.
Kohelet 11:2

תן-חלק לְשִׁבְעָה, וגם לְשִׁמוֹנָה: פִּי לֹא יִדְעֶה,
מֵה-יִהְיֶה רָעָה עַל-הָאָרֶץ.
קהלת יא:ב

The Midrash, *Kohelet Rabbah* 11:2, quotes one opinion that the reference in the verse to seven and eight is an allusion to Sukkot which is a seven day holiday with an additional day holiday at the end. Yet, other commentators provide additional reasons for reading Kohelet on Sukkot. In this article, we will discuss some of those other reasons.

Kohelet as a Public Lecture

While the author of Kohelet, generally assumed to be King Shlomo,¹³ refers to himself as "Kohelet ben David," the name Kohelet is a reflection of the content of the book. Rashi writes:

[It is called] Kohelet because he gathered many different forms of wisdom. There are some who say that it is because these words were said

קהלת - על שם שקיהל
חכמות הרבה ... וי"א שהיה

¹³ The *Beraita* in *Baba Batra* 15a, states that Kohelet was written by King Chizkiah, yet there are many Midrashim that state that King Shlomo is Kohelet. *Da'at Mikra*, Introduction to Kohelet, note 1a, suggests that these are the words of King Shlomo that were recorded in writing by King Chizkiah.

at hakhel [the gathering of the Jewish people after the sabbatical year.]
Rashi, Kohelet 1:1

אומר כל דבריו בהקהל.
רש"י קהלת א:א

The name Kohelet is from the word קהל which means to collect or to gather. This can either refer to the collection of wisdom or to the gathering of the people.

R. David Abudraham (14th century) relates Rashi's second interpretation to our tradition to read Kohelet on Sukkot:

There is another reason and that is that Shlomo said these words on Sukkot as it states (Devarim 31:10) on the holiday [at the conclusion] of the shemitah year, on Sukkot, when the Jewish people come to be seen, gather the nation, the men, women and children, etc. and it states (Melachim I 8:2) they all gathered to King Shlomo during the month of Etanim, on Sukkot, etc. and it was then that he recited [Kohelet] during hakhel in order to rebuke the Jewish people. For this reason, it is logical to recite it on Sukkot. This is from the writings of Ibn HaYarchi.

Sefer Abudraham, Tefillot HaPesach

ועוד טעם אחר כי שלמ"ה בחג
אמרו בהקהל כמו שכתוב (דב' לא,
(י) במועד שנת השמיטה בחג
הסוכות בבא כל ישראל לראות וגו'
הקהל את העם האנשים והנשים
והטף וגו' וכתוב ויקהלו אל המלך
שלמה בירח האתנים בחג וגו' ואז
אמרו בהקהל להוכיח את ישראל
על כן יתכן לאומרו בחג כל זה כתב
אבן הירחי.

ספר אבודרהם תפלות הפסח

According to R. Naftali Z.Y. Berlin (The Netziv, 1816-1893), King Shlomo's gathering was of a slightly different nature:

In the fourteenth chapter of Zechariah it states that in the future, the nations of the world will come on Chol HaMoed of Sukkot to stand next to their offering because they will also recognize the sovereignty of God, the King ... This was also the tradition during the days of Shlomo and for this reason, Shlomo would recite Kohelet on Chol HaMoed Sukkot to the nations of the world ... For this reason, we have been reciting Kohelet throughout the generations on Chol HaMoed Sukkot.

Harchev Davar, Bamidbar 29:12

כתב בספר זכריה י"ד דלעתיד יהיו גם
אומות העולם באים בחול המועד סוכות
לעמוד על קרבנם, היינו בשביל שיכירו
גם המה את מלך ה' צבאות ... וכך היה
המנהג בימי שלמה, ומשום הכי היה
שלמה מגיד קהלת בחול המועד סוכות
לפני חכמי אומות העולם... ומזה אנו
נוהגין מדור דור לקרוא קהלת בחול
המועד סוכות.

הרחב דבר במדבר כט:יב

According to Netziv, Kohelet contains a universal message. The message was delivered on an annual basis to the leaders of all nations of the world on Sukkot and we continue that tradition in our synagogues.

The Contradictions of Kohelet

R. Avraham Gombiner (c.1633-1683) provides another reason for reading Kohelet on Sukkot:

On Sukkot [we read] Kohelet because they are days of joy and it states in Kohelet (2:2) "what does joy accomplish?"

Magen Avraham 490:8

ובסוכות קהלת מפני שהם ימי שמחה וכתוב
בהקלה ולשמחה מה זו עושה.

מגן אברהם תצ:ח

His comment seems somewhat puzzling. *Simcha* (joy) is one of the themes of Sukkot. Why then, would we read Kohelet specifically because of a verse that states that *simcha* is meaningless?

In order to understand R. Gombiner's comments, it is necessary to provide some background. There was a debate during Mishnaic times whether Kohelet should be canonized as one of the books of Tanach (see *Eduyot* 5:3 and *Yadayim* 3:5). The Gemara teaches us the basis for the debate and why it was ultimately accepted as one of the books of Tanach:

R. Yehuda son of R. Samuel b. Sheilat said in Rav's name: The Sages wished to conceal the Book of Ecclesiastes, because its words are self-contradictory; yet why did they not conceal it? Because its beginning is religious teaching and its end is religious teaching. Its beginning is religious teaching, as it is written, What benefit does man get for of all his labor that he labors under the sun? And the School of R. Yannai commented: Under the sun he has none, but he has benefit before the sun. The end is religious teaching, as it is written, Let us hear the conclusion of the matter, fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole of man. What is meant by, 'for this is the whole of man'?-Said R. Eliezar, The entire world was created only for the sake of this [type of] man. And how are its words self-contradictory? ... It is written, Then I commended joy; but it is written, and of joy [I said] What does it accomplish?" There is no difficulty ... "Then I commended joy': this refers to the joy of a commandment. 'And of joy [I said], what does it accomplish': this refers to joy [which is] not in connection with a commandment.

Shabbat 30b (adapted from Soncino Translation)

אמר רב יהודה בריה דרב שמואל בר
שילת משמיה דרב בקשו חכמים
לגנוז ספר קהלת מפני שדבריו
סותרין זה את זה ומפני מה לא גנוזהו
מפני שתחילתו דברי תורה וסופו
דברי תורה תחילתו דברי תורה
דכתיב מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו
שיעמול תחת השמש ואמרי דבי ר'
ינאי תחת השמש הוא דאין לו קודם
שמש יש לו סופו דברי תורה דכתיב
סוף דבר הכל נשמע את האלהים ירא
ואת מצותיו שמור כי זה כל האדם
מאי כי זה כל האדם אמר רבי
(אליעזר) כל העולם כולו לא נברא
אלא בשביל זה ... ומאי דבריו סותרין
זה את זה ... כתיב ושבתני אני את
השמחה וכתיב ולשמחה מה זה עושה
לא קשיא ... ושבתני אני את השמחה
שמחה של מצוה ולשמחה מה זה
עושה זו שמחה שאינה של מצוה.
שבת ל:

On one level, it is possible to understand R. Gombiner's comment as an allusion to the Talmud's understanding of the verse "What does joy accomplish?" When we read Kohelet on Sukkot, we are supposed to be reminded of the message that true *simcha* is only achieved when it is the context of our service of God. This, in fact, is how R. Yosef Teomim (author of *P'ri Megadim* 1727-1793) understands the tradition of reading Kohelet on Sukkot:

In Kohelet, there are times when he criticizes joy and times when he praises it ... The resolution is that that he criticizes being joyful to engage in acts of evil or in eating and drinking. However, the joy in performing mitzvot and serving God is good. Therefore, we read Kohelet so that we don't think that we should rejoice before God for seven days with frivolity, eating and drinking, rather with the joy of observing mitzvot.

Sefer HaMagid, Vol. III Second Derasha for Sukkot

ובקהלת פעם מגנה השמחה ופעם
משבחה ... אלא מגנה השמחה לעשות
רע וה"ה אכילה ושתיה אבל השמחה
במצות ועבודת ה' טוב ולכן קורים
קהלת שלא תאמר ושמחתם לפני ה'
שבעת ימים בהוללות באכילה ובשתיה
כי אם שמחה של מצוה.
ספר המגיד חלק ג' דרוש ב' לסוכות

One can also understand R. Gombiner's comment on a deeper level. As the Talmud notes, Kohelet was considered a controversial work because of statements that seem to contradict one another. While the Talmud only provides two such examples, R. Avraham Ibn Ezra (c. 1089-1164), *Kohelet* 7:3, provides nine examples of these statements and writes that there are others. Nevertheless, despite all of the apparent contradictions, the rabbis felt that Kohelet is worthy of canonization because of its beginning and end. R. Avraham Y. Kook (1865-1935) explains the significance of this decision:

For this reason they didn't conceal it because it begins with words of Torah which teach of the initial support of the pure innocence and natural instinct that is rooted in the holy soul of a Jew. It ends with words of Torah, after the lengthy intellectual pursuit, it returns to the foundation that it outlined at the beginning ... When we see that despite the resistance and contradiction, the conclusion is a reflection of the original principles, we understand the great strength of pure fear of God upon which everything is contingent and must always accompany one's pursuits.

Ein Ayah, Shabbat 30b

ע"כ לא גנזוהו מפני שתחילתו ד"ת, המורה על הצעד הראשון של התמימות והטבעיות הטהורה המושרשת בקדושת נפשותיהם של ישראל. וסופו ד"ת, אחרי האריכות המדעית חוזר הדבר לאותן המושגים עצמם שנסתמנו בתחילה ... ובראותינו שעם ההתעוררות על הניגודים והסתירות באה המסקנה למקור יציאתה, אז נשכיל את גודל עז אור יראת ד' טהורה, שעלי ועל כל התלוי ומתלוה עמה.

עין איה, שבת ל':

Perhaps R. Gombiner's reference to the verse "What does joy do [for a person]?" is an allusion to the broader issues of Kohelet: its contradictory statements and how we deal with them. The message, as expressed by R. Kook, is that our intellectual pursuits may take us to places where there are contradictions and uncertainty, but we must always be rooted in our faith in God and this must guide our conclusions. The message that Kohelet provides about our intellectual pursuits is parallel to the message that Sukkot provides about our physical pursuits. Rashbam (c. 1085-1158) explains why we sit in Sukkot specifically during the harvest season:

For this reason, we leave houses full of abundance during the harvest season and sit in Sukkot as a remembrance that [the Jewish people] didn't have estates in the desert or houses to dwell in. For this reason, God set the holiday of Sukkot during the harvest season of grain and olives so that we don't become arrogant about our homes full of abundance and say that it was our own hands that created this situation.

Rashbam, Vayikra 23:43

ולכך יוצאים מבתי מלאים כל טוב בזמן אסיפה ויושבין בסוכות לזכרון שלא היה להם נחלה במדבר ולא בתים לשבת. ומפני הטעם הזה קבע הק' את חג הסוכות בזמן אסיפת גורן ויקב, לבלתי רום לבבם על בתיהם מלאים כל טוב פן יאמרו ידינו עשו לנו את החיל הזה. **רשב"ם ויקרא כג: מג**

Sukkot represents a time when a farmer should feel financial security. His warehouses are full and his short term needs are taken care of. It is as this time when the Torah states that we need to be re-educated about the basics, we must realize that our financial success and security is a function of God providing for us. We may have been more cognizant of this idea before we became successful, but are we still aware of it now? For this reason, the Torah tells us to ignore our financial successes and live in a temporary dwelling that is covered by the refuse of the

harvest¹⁴ so that we can remind ourselves that our physical and financial security is provided by God. Through the sukkah experience, our physical pursuits are channeled back to our original point of departure when we realize:

*The end of the matter, all having been heard: fear God,
and keep His commandments; for this is the whole man.*
Kohelet 12:13 (JPS translation)

סוף דבר, הכל נשמע: את-האלקים ירא ואת-
מצותיו שמור, כי-זה כל-האדם.
קהלת יב:יג

¹⁴ The Gemara, *Sukkah* 12a, states that the Sukkah must be covered specifically with vegetation. This law is derived from the fact that the Torah refers to the harvest season in mentioning Sukkot, implying that one should cover the Sukkah with the refuse of the harvest. While there is no halachic requirement to specifically use refuse, the derivation does provide an important message.

Vanities vs. Progression: The Lessons and Joy of *Koheles* and *Sukkos*

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*Vanity of vanities, said Koheles, vanity of vanities, all is vain.*¹⁵

Koheles 1:2

הַבַּל הַבָּלִים אָמַר קֹהֵלֶת הַבַּל הַבָּלִים הַכֹּל
הַבַּל.
קֹהֵלֶת א:ב

A seemingly depressing commencement to a seemingly depressing book – and yet, Koheles is read on Sukkos, the most joyous of the holidays, called *שמחתנו* זמן, the time of our joy.¹⁶ Not only does the opening of Koheles discuss *hevel*, vanity, nothingness, but it is the constant theme of Shlomo HaMelech's¹⁷ book.

I saw all the deeds that were done under the sun, and behold, everything is vanity and frustration.

Koheles 1:14

רָאִיתִי אֶת כָּל הַמַּעֲשִׂים שֶׁנַּעֲשׂוּ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְהִנֵּה הַכֹּל
הַבָּל וְרֵעוּת רֵוָח.
קֹהֵלֶת א:יד

Then I turned [to look] at all my deeds that my hands had wrought and upon the toil that I had toiled to do, and behold everything is vanity and frustration, and there is no profit under the sun.

Koheles 2:11

וּפְנִיתִי אֲנִי בְּכֹל מַעֲשֵׂי שְׁעֵשׂוּ יָדַי
וּבְעֵמֶל שְׁעֵמְלֹתַי לַעֲשׂוֹת וְהִנֵּה
הַכֹּל הַבָּל וְרֵעוּת רֵוָח וְאִין יִתְרוֹן
תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ.
קֹהֵלֶת ב:יא

For there is a happening for the children of men, and there is a happening for the beasts – and they have one happening – like the death of this one is the death of that one, and all have one spirit, and the superiority of man over beast is naught, for all is vanity.

Koheles 3:19

כִּי מִקְרָה בְּנֵי הָאָדָם וּמִקְרָה הַבְּהֵמָה
וּמִקְרָה אֶחָד לָהֶם כָּמוֹת זֶה כִּן מוֹת
זֶה וְרוּחַ אֶחָד לְכֹל וּמוֹתֵר הָאָדָם מִן
הַבְּהֵמָה אִין כִּי הַכֹּל הַבָּל.
קֹהֵלֶת ג:יט

¹⁵ Translations of pesukim in Koheles are taken from the Judaic Press Koheles (by Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg).

¹⁶ שמונה עשרה of Sukkos.

¹⁷ גמ' מגילה ז. "דברי קהלת בן דוד" – "דברי קהלת א:א – Koheles was the son of David; See also ז.

The world *hevel* appears 36 times throughout the book of Koheles.¹⁸ What was Shlomo HaMelech referring to with his usage of this word? What message was Shlomo trying to impart through writing Koheles at the culmination of his life?¹⁹ Why is this message about *hevel*, and this book of Koheles, particularly appropriate for Sukkos?

Definition of *Hevel*

Upon a closer analysis of Shlomo Hamelech's description of *hevel* in the first chapter, a particular theme emerges.

A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth endures forever. The sun rises and the sun sets, and to its place it yearns and rises there. It goes to the south and goes around to the north; the wind goes around and around, and the wind returns to its circuits... To the place where the rivers flow, there they repeatedly go... What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.

Koheles 1:4-9

דור הלך ודור בא והארץ לעולם עמדת.
ונרח השמש ובא השמש ואל מקומו
שואף זורח הוא שם. הולך אל דרום
וסובב אל צפון סובב סבב הולך הרוח
ועל סביבתיו שב הרוח... אל מקום
שהנהלים הלכים שם הם שבים ללקת...
מה שהיה הוא שיהיה ומה שנעשה הוא
שיעשה ואין כל חדש תחת השמש.
קהלת א:ד-ט

The picture that emerges from the *hevel*, vanity, described here is one of a circle. What Shlomo describes as *hevel* is a situation in which the same event occurs over and over again, whether that refers to a cycle of nature or to generations coming and going. A circle has no beginning and no end. One is never finished going around a circle, for one can go around and around forever. *Hevel*, according to Shlomo, refers to the concept of repetition without progress, of working but not moving forward.²⁰

This understanding of *hevel*, of circling around without progressing, explains a difficult passage in the Talmud.

Rabbi Elazar taught... Which generation is entirely vanities? This is the generation of the judges.

Bava Basra 15b

רבי אלעזר אומר...איזה דור שכולו הבל הוי
אומר זה דורו של שפוט השופטים.
בבא בתרא טו:

Why is the generation of the judges considered to be *hevel*?

The stories of *Sefer Shoftim* follow a particular pattern, albeit each with slight variance. B'nei Yisroel live in their land, and then they sin. Their sin is sometimes punctuated with the line "בַּיָּמִים הֵהֵם אֵין מֶלֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ הַיֶּשֶׁר בְּעֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה" "In those days, there was no king in Israel, [and so] each person did what was right in his own eyes."²¹ This statement is an implicit

¹⁸ Rabbi Yehoshua Rozenberg, retrieved from <http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/tanach/megilot/kohelet4.htm>.

¹⁹ "שיר השירים רבה א:י". But see רשי ד"ה והלא כבר נאמר וידבר כו'. which implies that Koheles was written earlier in Shlomo's life.

²⁰ Heard in the name of Rabbi Eliyahu Yedid, author of "שבע נביאות".

²¹ See שופטים י:יז, as well as several other times throughout the *sefer*.

criticism of B'nei Yisroel for not anointing a king,²² which was one of the three commandments (along with destroying *Amalek* and building the *Beis Hamikdash*) they should have fulfilled once they entered *Eretz Yisroel*.²³ Once the Jewish people sinned, they were attacked by an enemy, at which point Hashem sent a judge to save them. Thereafter, the story repeats itself.

Given that there was a repeating pattern of sin, without B'nei Yisroel learning from their mistakes, without B'nei Yisroel deciding to anoint a king who would have protected them from sin, the generation of the *shoftim* can be described as a circle that progresses nowhere. On a symbolic level, this pattern explains why the generation of the judges is considered to be *hevel*, worthless. B'nei Yisroel in that time period did not advance, they did not fulfill any of their three commandments, and they kept slipping into the same pattern of sin. Living without development is indeed *hevel*, nothingness.²⁴

In fact, this symbolism explains why the representation for zero, nothing, is indeed a circle. A parable is given regarding a child who learns the numbers one through nine. When his teacher shows him a zero, the child asks, what is the purpose of the zero if it has no value? The teacher explains that even though zero has no value alone, when it is attached to another number, it increases that number by tens, hundreds, and thousands. So too, even if the material possessions that a person has in this world are *hevel*, worthless by themselves, when a person uses those material possessions for spiritual pursuits they become elevated to the status of *מצוה*, tools utilized to perform an act of holiness. Hence, *הבלי הבליים*, vanities of vanities, is only true when *הכל הבלי*, all is vain, and it is just a circular zero by itself. But if it were joined to a mitzvah, it would no longer have the status of *hevel*.²⁵

Koheles Teaches about Progression

The true Torah lesson that can be learned from Koheles is that we should not live in a circular, repetitive lifestyle, but rather we should proceed through life in a linear progression. Chazal understood this message from many of the pesukim in Koheles, of which we will examine just two.

The pasuk quoted above (Koheles 1:4) "דור הלך ודור בא" "a generation goes and a generation comes," is not simply bemoaning that people die and are born. Rather, Chazal understand:

R. Abba bar Kahana said in the name of R. Ada bar Chunya, the generation that comes should be in your eyes like the generation that passed, that you shouldn't say, if Rabbi Akiva were alive now, I would learn from him... rather the generation and the wise men who are in your times are like the generation and the wise men who were before you.

Koheles Rabbah 1:4

ר' אבא בר כהנא ואמרי לה בשם ר'
אדא בר חוניא יהיה בעיניך דור שבא
כדור שהלך שלא תאמר אילו היה ר'
עקיבא קיים הייתי קורא לפניו... אלא
דור שבא בימיך וחכם שבימיך כדור
שהלך וחכמים הראשונים שהיו לפניך.
קהלת רבה א:ד

²² See מצודת דוד, רדק שם.

²³ סנהדרין כ:.

²⁴ Heard in the name of Rabbi Eliyahu Yedid, author of "שבע נביאות".

²⁵ תורה לדעת, חלק ג', מועדים, דף סב.

This lesson is learned from the pasuk in the Torah, "וּבְבֹאֲתָ... וְאֶל הַשֹּׁפֵט אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בְּיָמֶיךָ הַהֵם" "and you should go ... to the judge that you have in those days."²⁶ Rashi explains: "אפילו אינו כשאר" "Even if he is not like the judges who were before him, you have to listen to him, for you have no one other than the judge who is in your days."²⁷

At first glance, Rashi's comment may look like a *בדיעבד*, an *ex post facto* position. Since we have no one as great as the previous judges, we have no choice but to go to the judges that we have now. However, R. Chaim Shmulevitz explains that this is not the case. Rather, the judges and leaders of our generation are *לכתחילה*, *a priori*, special and perfect for our generation. Previous leaders would not be helpful in our generation, as every generation has its tailor-made rabbis for its own unique situations.²⁸

In fact, the *Midrash*²⁹ brings a proof for this point by quoting a pasuk from Divrei HaYamim I 12:28 that states that Yehoyada (a כהן, priest, from a later generation) was a ruler of Aharon HaCohen. The *Midrash* explains that even if Aharon would have lived in Yehoyada's generation, Yehoyada would still have been his ruler, because in Yehoyada's generation, the people needed Yehoyada's rulership specifically.³⁰

We see from this that the message of this pasuk is about progression. We cannot simply lament the generations that passed and say that we lack strong leaders like we once had. Rather, Koheles is teaching about the succession of leadership. Each generation has its own tailor-made leaders, and it is incumbent upon the generation to follow those leaders.

The same message can be seen from the penultimate verse of Koheles:

The end of the matter, everything having been heard, [is to] fear G-d and keep His commandments, for this is the entire man.

Koheles 12:13

סוף דְבַר הַכֹּל נִשְׁמַע אֶת הָאֱלֹקִים יִרָא
וְאֶת מִצְוֹתָיו שְׁמֹר כִּי זֶה כָּל הָאָדָם.
קֹהֶלֶת יב:יג

This pasuk encapsulates the message of Koheles, and therefore is repeated after the last verse, in order to end on this note. Everything in Koheles, all the *hevel* and cycles described, become worthwhile if, and only if, there is *יראת ה'*, fear of G-d. Fear of G-d can be seen as the "one" that must precede the "zero" of the *hevel*, and in doing so makes everything worthwhile.

²⁶ דברים יז:ט.

²⁷ רשי שם.

²⁸ See also: שיחות מוסר דף קסט. See also: ראש השנה כה: "Yiftach in his generation is like Shmuel in his generation."

²⁹ קהלת רבה א:ד.

³⁰ See also the story of חוני המעגל brought in בגמ' תענית כג. When Choni awoke after 70 years, he went to the *beis medrash* and saw that the rabbis were teaching his explanations of the Torah. When he tried to tell them that he was Choni, they didn't believe him. The Maharsha asks, why did Choni not prove to the Rabbis who he was by teaching them his explanations? R. Chaim Shmulevitz answers that it was because they could only learn it from their own modern-day teachers, and previous *rabbanim* were not appropriate for them.

Perhaps this also explains why Moshe Rabbeinu could not understand the *divrei Torah* of R. Akiva (מנחות כט:). Since R. Akiva was explaining the Torah in the way most appropriate for his own generation, even Moshe, from a previous generation, could not understand it.

Rav Shlomo Wolbe³¹ explains that fearing G-d means to listen to His words.³² When the verse says "כי זה כל האדם", "for this is the entire man," this could have one of three explanations: either (1) the whole world was created for the one who listens to G-d, (2) the G-d fearing man is equal to the whole world, or (3) the whole world was worth being created in order to command listening to G-d.³³

The significance of placing this verse at the end of Koheles is to highlight that this is the message of the whole book. Being G-d fearing, i.e. listening to G-d and observing His commandments, demonstrates the ultimate progression and accomplishment. After Shlomo HaMelech has explored all different aspects of the world throughout the sefer, he concludes that true growth is only attained through fearing G-d, and that this is the purpose of the whole world's creation!

Sukkos is the Holiday of Progression

Sukkos is a clear demonstration of linear progression. Sukkos is known as חג האסיף,³⁴ the holiday of the gathering. Sukkos is the culmination of the harvest that began in the spring. Pesach is the חג האביב,³⁵ the spring holiday when fields are planted, and Shavous is the חג הקציר,³⁶ the holiday when the first stalks are cut. The agricultural year culminates at the time of Sukkos, which is when the produce of the field is gathered into the house in preparation for the coming winter. Sukkos shows that our agricultural work has a purpose, has a progression, in which something is formed from raw materials.

Sukkos can also be thought of as the culmination of two different groups of Jewish festivals. Sukkos is the culmination of the *Shalosh Regalim* holidays which began on Pesach. The Jews were redeemed from Egypt on Pesach, which occurred in the spring, the season of nature's renewal. The Exodus was the "birth" of the Jewish nation, as they were free to act on their own. Shavous is the holiday when the Jews accepted the Torah, when they received the meaning in their life, their mission. Yet, the culmination of an accomplishment is not when one receives a mission, but rather when one completes it. Sukkos represents the fulfillment of the mission. Sukkos commemorates when the Jews were protected in the desert with sukkahs, כִּי בַסֻּכּוֹת "for in sukkah-booths did I settle B'nei Yisroel when I took them out of the land of Egypt."³⁷ The sukkahs, either literal booths or the Clouds of Glory,³⁸ represent the deep connection between B'nei Yisroel and Hashem. The sukkah represents that the Jews are willing to leave their permanent dwelling to live in a temporary dwelling and rely on Hashem's protection. Thus, Sukkos is the holiday celebrating the

³¹ עלי שור חלק א' דף רפח.

³² See שמות ט:כ, that the servants of Paroah who feared Hashem, listened to Him and brought their animals inside.

³³ גמ' ברכות ו'.

³⁴ שמות כג:טז, among other places.

³⁵ דברים טז:טז.

³⁶ שמות כג:טז.

³⁷ ויקרא כג:מג.

³⁸ See גמ' סוכה יא'.

progression of the Jewish people from their birth, to the acceptance of their mission, and finally to the completion of the task for which Hashem created them.³⁹

Sukkos is also the conclusion of the *Yamim Noraim*, the High Holidays. In fact, Sukkos, the holiday of joy, is not just the chronological end of the time period including Rosh Hashanah, the *Aseres Y'mei Teshuvah* (the Ten Days of Repentance), and Yom Kippur, but rather its climax. One cannot enter the exclusive protection of the sukkah when one is still full of sin. Therefore, prior to Sukkos, Hashem granted B'nei Yisroel the gift of the High Holidays, which give the Jews the opportunity to repent and be forgiven. Only after the Jews have progressed through the process of repentance and forgiveness can we celebrate the joy of Hashem's protection in the sukkah.⁴⁰

The highest point of happiness on Sukkos took place in the *Simchas Beis Hashoeva*.

One who did not see the happiness of the Simchas Beis Hashoeva (literally 'the happiness of the house of the drawing') never saw happiness in his life.

Sukkah 51a

מי שלא ראה שמחת בית
השואבה לא ראה שמחה
בימיו.
גמ' סוכה נא.

What was the *Simchas Beis Hashoeva*? In the procedure of *ניסוך המים*, the pouring of the water, water (instead of the customary wine) was placed on the altar in addition to the daily sacrifice all seven days of Sukkos. Prior to the pouring, there was great happiness and celebration the entire night, which was called the *Simchas Beis Hashoeva*.⁴¹

One explanation why the pouring of the water generated such a happy celebration could be that it was an expression of the unity of B'nei Yisroel. B'nei Yisroel progressed through the agricultural and spiritual cycle of the year, which came to a head on Yom Kippur, at which point each Jew stood equally before Hashem and begged for forgiveness. The barrier to unity, the ego, was negated when mankind was on trial, and all were equal. This unity carried through to Sukkos, when all, rich and poor, were required to dwell in a hut.⁴² This message is an additional reason why Sukkos is referred to as *הג האסוף*, the holiday of gathering, for all the Jews gathered together equally.⁴³ Therefore, plain water, not fancy wine, was poured on the altar, to symbolize that Hashem accepted all Jews, regardless of stature, as long as they 'put themselves on the altar' and approached Him sincerely.⁴⁴ Accordingly, the happiness of the *Simchas Beis Hashoeva* is related to the progression of B'nei Yisroel from individuals into a united nation.

Alternatively, the *Sfas Emes* explains that the happiness of Sukkos comes from the completion of Hashem's dominion over everything. Therefore, B'nei Yisroel offered seventy cows on the altar during the days of Sukkos for the seventy nations of the world, praying that Hashem's rule

³⁹ R. Nosson Scherman, the Artscroll Machzor Sukkos, retrieved from www.innernet.org.il/article.php?aid=244.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ גמ' ראש השנה טז. One reason for the pouring of the water is that on Sukkos we are judged for the coming year's waterfall, and so we pour water on the altar to pray that the coming year's rainfall be blessed.

⁴² Retrieved from <http://www.torah.org/learning/yomtov/sukkos/vol3no21.html>.

⁴³ שפת אמת, דרוש לסוכות, שנת תרל"ד.

⁴⁴ Retrieved from <http://www.torah.org/learning/yomtov/sukkos/vol3no21.html>.

becomes complete over the entire world. Similarly, the pouring of the water was a prayer that Hashem extend his authority over the entire creation.⁴⁵ According to this understanding as well, it can be explained that progression, in this case the evolution of Hashem's rule over the entire world, is key to the happiness of the moment.⁴⁶

Progression is the True Joy

It is not surprising that the Torah ascribes the most joy to the holiday of Sukkos. There is a general commandment to have שמחה יום טוב, happiness on the holidays, which applies to all the festivals. In addition to this general command, Pesach has no direct mandate for additional gladness, and Shavous has one extra instruction for enjoyment.⁴⁷ By Sukkos, however, the Torah includes **three** additional directives for joy!⁴⁸ The *Yalkut Shimoni*⁴⁹ states that the extra delight of Sukkos comes after we have atoned for our sins on Yom Kippur, as well as the culmination of the agricultural year. Sukkos elicits the highest feeling of accomplishment, progression, satisfaction, and therefore happiness.

Ultimately, the greatest pleasure of all comes from progression, from attaining a goal. Sukkos symbolizes not only the completion of agricultural targets, but also the accomplishment of spiritual aims – both the Jewish nation's completion of its mission to dwell in Hashem's presence, and also the attainment of forgiveness through Yom Kippur. This is truly the reason why Sukkos is זמן שמחתנו, the time of our greatest bliss.⁵⁰

Thus, Koheles, which teaches the lesson of progression, is the most appropriate book to be read on Sukkos. Far from a depressing book, Koheles teaches about the avoidance of *hevel*, of working without advancement, of traveling in a circular path without accomplishing any objective. It teaches about the importance of moving forward, which brings the ultimate joy. How apt for Koheles to be read on Sukkos, the holiday which celebrates our greatest elation that has come through the progression of the seasons, of the holiday cycles, and of our own repentance. May the lessons of Koheles inspire us to progress to new heights in our own lives, allowing us the ultimate joy of the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash*, speedily and in our times.

⁴⁵ שפת אמת, דרוש לסוכות, שנת תרל"ד.

⁴⁶ Interestingly, the number of cows offered as קרבנות on each day of Sukkos **decreased**, seemingly negating the idea of progression on Sukkos. See the מהרש"א on כא: שבת גמ' who discusses the discrepancy between the number of קרבנות decreasing and the concept of מורידין ואין מורידין, that it is preferential to progress in holiness and not regress.

⁴⁷ דברים טז:יא.

⁴⁸ ויקרא כג:מ – "ושמחתם לפני ה' אלוכם שבעת ימים", דברים טז:יד – "ושמחת בחגך", דברים טז:טו – "והיית אך שמח".

⁴⁹ ילקוט שמעוני פרשת אמור אות תרנד.

⁵⁰ שפת אמת, דרוש לסוכות, שנת תרל"ד.

Why did *Shemini Atzeret* Become *Simchat Torah*?

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The Torah describes Succot repeatedly as a seven-day holiday (Vayikra 23, Bemidbar 29, Devarim 16). Yet the *pesukim* add that the eighth day will be “*atzeret*,” literally “stopping” or “gathering,” to be celebrated as a festival. What is the nature of this eighth day? Why is Succot described as lasting seven days, if it seems to actually last eight? Why does Succot have an “extra” day, given that the parallel seven-day holiday of Pesach has no eighth? Indeed, Amoraim debate (Succah 47b) whether we say the *bracha* of *shehecheyanu* on *Shemini Atzeret* (as we do over lighting candles and *kiddush* of all festivals, except for the last day of Pesach). The Gemara concludes that we do say the blessing, because *Shemini Atzeret* is considered its own holiday in many different respects. This debate seems to be about the nature of *Shemini Atzeret* – is this holiday an addendum to Succot, making *shehecheyanu* unnecessary since no new *chag* is beginning, or does it have its own unique character, necessitating *shehecheyanu*? If it does have its own theme, what is that theme? And how did this enigmatic day become the joyous holiday of Simchat Torah, which is not Biblically mandated at all?

Three approaches toward the nature of *Shemini Atzeret* emerge from the Talmud and *Midrashim*. . In *Pesikta deRav Kahana* (28), Rav Alexandri says that by using extra letters in the *pesukim* regarding the sacrifices of each day⁵¹ of Succot, Hashem hints to *Am Yisrael* to pray for rain. After Succot passes and we still have not taken the hint, Hashem gives us a whole day just to pray for rain. The special prayer for rain, *tefillat geshem*, is in fact recited on *Shemini Atzeret*. According to this view, *Shemini Atzeret* amplifies a theme that is latent during Succot, and that theme moves to center stage on the eighth day.

The Gemara (*Succah* 55b) provides a second perspective, based on the striking difference between the sacrifices brought throughout Succot and those offered on *Shemini Atzeret*. On each day of Succot, we offer bulls on the *mizbe'ach* -- thirteen on the first day, twelve on the second, eleven on the third, and so forth. But then the pattern breaks – we offer seven bulls on the

⁵¹In Bemidbar 29:29, 33, there are three words that the midrash identifies as having extra letters: ונסכיהם, ונסכיה, ונסכיהם. Those extra letters are מ-י-מ, which spells *mayim*, water.

seventh day of Succot, but just one bull on *Shemini Atzeret*. Why? Rabbi Elazar explains that the seventy bulls offered over Succot correspond to the seventy nations of the world, with one bull offered on behalf of each nation; *Shemini Atzeret's* sacrifice of one bull, on the other hand, symbolizes Hashem's asking His beloved nation for just a small meal to enjoy. The Midrash in *Bemidbar Rabbah* modifies this slightly: Hashem is like a king who invites all his subjects to a seven-day feast, and afterward says to his beloved, "Let us enjoy whatever you can find, a bit of meat, or fish, or vegetables." According to this idea, Succot is a universal holiday; indeed, Zechariah (14:16-19) prophesies that one day, all the nations will celebrate Succot. *Shemini Atzeret*, however, is only for the Jewish people, and it is a modest holiday just to celebrate Hashem's special relationship with His beloved people.

Rashi provides the third approach. In his commentary on the Torah (Vayikra 23:36, s.v. "*Atzeret Hi*"), he cites the following: "I have stopped you with Me, like a king who invited his sons to a meal for a certain number of days; when the time came to part, he asked his children, 'Please stay with me one more day; *'kashah alai preidatchem,*' your departure is difficulty for me." According to this understanding, all of Succot is a holiday for Hashem to enjoy with His children, the Jewish people. At the end, however, he adds *Shemini Atzeret* because it is so difficult for Him to see us go. *Shemini Atzeret* is neither an opportunity to emphasize a concept that was hidden during Succot nor a holiday with its own theme – it is simply a moving expression of Hashem's desire that we stay with Him, that we delay our departure.

Let us now return to the question debated by the Amoraim: Should we recite the blessing of *shehecheyanu* on *Shemini Atzeret* or not? Perhaps the answer depends on how one views this holiday. If its main theme is to pray for rain, which we should have been done on Succot, it is debatable whether it warrants its own *shehecheyanu*. One could argue that no new blessing is necessary, since rain is a theme that exists on Succot through the pouring of the water on the altar and the hints to pray for rain throughout those days; on the other hand, rain is emphasized more prominently on *Shemini Atzeret*. If, in line with our second approach, *Shemini Atzeret* is a "personal" holiday for the Jewish people after the universal holiday of Succot, one can well understand that it warrants its own *shehecheyanu*. If, however, as Rashi writes, *Shemini Atzeret* is an added day to Succot, just to stay a bit longer, it is hard to understand why that would be considered a new holiday – isn't it really exactly the same as the previous seven days? Staying one more day at the same house or on the same vacation wouldn't count in our minds as a new entity. According to this approach, why would there be a requirement to say *shehecheyanu* on *Shemini Atzeret*?

Perhaps the nature of *Shemini Atzeret* is exactly that – it celebrates our unique relationship with Hashem, that He loves us and does not want to see us go. It actually *is* a separate day – a day that celebrates our close bond with Hashem as His chosen, beloved people. "*Kasha alai preidatchem*" highlights a different quality to our relationship with Hashem, one not emphasized previously, and therefore it does not simply add a day to Succot, but creates a unique day, one that deserves its own *shehecheyanu*.

Perhaps this final approach answers another question as well: Why this day became *Simchat Torah*. The Rabbis could not leave the day an empty shell⁵² – it was waiting to be filled with a celebration appropriate to its theme. Simchat Torah is a fitting celebration on this day, as we complete the public reading of the entire Torah, dance with the *Sifrei Torah* and celebrate our bond with Hashem. This is what we celebrate on Simchat Torah; it is not merely a *siyyum* of the Torah we have learned as a community each Shabbat throughout the year, but rather a celebration of Hashem's love for us, of the unique connection He has with us, and how much He wants us to remain close to Him.

⁵² It is an interesting question exactly when *Shemini Atzeret* evolved into *Simchat Torah*. The Gemara in *Megilla* 31a writes that we read *VeZot HaBerakhah* on *yom tov acharon*, which seems to indicate that we finish the Torah that day. The *Darkei Moshe* (OC 669) cites the Maharik, who quotes in the name of the Geonim that there was already at that time a *minhag* to dance on this day over the completion of the Torah.

The Reconciliation of Sukkos

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You selected us from amongst all the nations, you loved us, and you wanted us, and you raised us above all tongues, and you sanctified us with your commandments, and you brought us close to your service and you have conferred your great name on us.

Tefilla of Shalosh Regalim

אתה בחרתנו מכל העמים אהבת אותנו
ורצית בנו מכל הלשונות וקדשתנו
במצותיך וקרבתנו מלכנו לעבודתך
ושמך הגדול והקדוש עלינו קראת
תפילה לשלש רגלים

With these descriptions of Hashem’s singular relationship with *Klal Yisroel*, we begin the *berochko* of the yom tov *Shemona Esrei* that addresses the sanctity of the day. That the sacredness of every yom tov and the holiness of the Jewish people are inextricably connected, is powerfully underscored by the closing line of this *berochko*, “*mekadesh yisrael vehazemanim*”, which Chazal teach us to read as “[Hashem] who sanctified the Jewish people who in turn confer holiness on the Holidays.”

However it would seem to me that the third phrase **ורצית בנו** – and you wanted us – is severely anticlimactic and certainly does not fit the pattern of otherwise ascending order of Divine blessings showered upon our people. Needless to say, would we have penned this text, would we not record “you wanted us” before writing “you chose us” and certainly before “you love us”? Surely Chazal are not suggesting that Hashem was unreasonably infatuated with us and fell into a romantic relationship with us, that which is the stuff of many a human saga. Therefore, how are we to understand the order of the words in the *tefilla*?

The Approach of the Gaon of Vilna

I believe that once understood, this text becomes a powerful support for the innovative interpretation that the Gaon of Vilna lends to the yom tov of Sukkos.

In fact, Sukkos is one of those parts of the Torah that will forever carry the imprint of the Gr”a. No doubt that it serves as but an example of how this towering 17th century genius, of legendary diligence, renowned scholarly scope and precision, and of unparalleled breadth, shaped our view of many a “parsha.”

The tradition of the Gr”a points out that the very first fifteenth of Tishrei that followed *Matan Torah* was the day that we as a people became fully licensed to build the *mishkan*. Consider that Moshe brought the final and enduring *luchos* to us on the eleventh of Tishre, and announced then that they were to build the *mishkan*. What must have ensued next would be three days of a frenzied

and certainly an unprecedented outpouring of gift giving for all the needs of the *mishkan*. By the time the sun set on the fourteenth of Tishrei, Moshe had announced that *Klal Yisrael* had successfully responded to Hashem's challenge and had provided all the materials and more!

Thus *Klal Yisrael* ushered in the eve of the fifteenth of Tishrei with the absolutely uplifting knowledge that the sin of the Golden Calf was behind them. Hashem had recommitted Himself to the *mishkan*, to living amongst His people, just as He had announced before the sin of the *Eigel*. Torah would continue to be taught from the *mishkan* through Moshe Rabeinu, concomitant with the great gift of *tzimtzum*,⁵³ which, as Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt"l was wont to explain, was the greatest sign of love for our people.

What a sense of accomplishment we should have experienced on that night! We had enthusiastically expressed our yearning for the *mishkan*, a dream that was part of our tradition from Yaakov Avinu and one about which we sang as we celebrated our salvation on the shores of the Yam Suf.⁵⁴

Accordingly, Sukkos commemorates the rapprochement of Hashem and His children after what may have been the most threatening event to our covenant and to the entire enterprise of "*bechiras Yisrael*." Looking forward, it celebrates the unbreakable bond that we have with the *Ribono Shel Olam* and it amplifies the protection that we venerate as we recall the Sukkos of the desert.⁵⁵

Consequently the holiday of Sukkos is associated in Chumash and in our practices with simcha more than any other yom tov, for is there greater simcha than rediscovering an endangered love, reestablishing a passionate relationship that was cast in jeopardy?

The Climax of Verotziso

With this new understanding of Sukkos in mind, we can appreciate a comment of the *Siach Yitzchak*, a commentary on Siddur written by a student of the Gr"a. He quotes his teacher as translating "*verotziso*" (ורציית) not as 'You wanted us,' but rather as "you have taken us back even after we betrayed or aggravated You." Thus, when reciting the *birchas kedushas hayom* of *Shemone Esrei*, one should have in mind that Hashem chose us, loved us and welcomed us back even after we had profoundly disappointed Him and His mission. Thus the varied descriptions of our chosenness certainly ascend and the phrase "*verotziso*" is hardly anticlimactic.

The Gr"a further teaches us that when we recite the opening line of the *berochos of kedushas hayom* we should have the following intention: On Pesach (אתה בחרתנו) You chose us to be Your partner in a covenant; on Shavuos (אהבת אותנו) You showed Your love for us as You

⁵³ Having Hashem appear in a physical setting, be it Har Sinai or the *Ohel Moed*, compromises, in the human mind, the very basic principle of His essence, His abstractness. That Hashem did this for us and then again in the *mikdash* in order to "live amongst us" is an indication of enormous love and concern.

⁵⁴ "Ze keili vanveihu" see Rashi

⁵⁵ It would seem then that the Gr"a understood that there could be several reasons for a mitzvah beyond even a reason explicitly stated in the Torah, or at least that a reason stated can be interpreted generously beyond its literal translation. This, not surprisingly, is consistent with another tradition from the Gr"a. Rabbinic legislation is maintained even after the stated reasons no longer maintain. The Gr"a is quoted as explaining this ruling as a result of the possibilities of there being several reasons for a legislation and that the rabbis decided to record only one of them.

revealed to us the content of the covenant and the promise that we can aspire to; on Sukkos (ורצית בנו) You reconciled with us and announced a covenant that can weather our terrible weaknesses and frailties.

The Source of Verotziso

Where is the first time that *verotziso* appears in Chumash? This question is predicated on an oft quoted teaching of the Gr”a: the nuanced understanding of any word can be interpolated from the context of the word’s first appearance in Tanach. We first find this term when Yaakov meets his brother Eisav after returning from the house of Lavan.

And Yaacov said, "please, if I have found favor in your eyes, that you shall take my mincha offering from my hands, for I have seen your face like I would see the face of the Lord, and we have been reconciled."

Bereishit 33:10

ויאמר יעקב אל נא אם נא מצאתי
חן בעיניך ולקחת מנחתי מידי כי
על כן ראיתי פניך כראת פני
אלהים ותרצוני:
בראשית לג:

This is the moment of reconciliation after years of enmity. Estranged from each other for decades, understandably, after Eisav commits himself to kill Yaakov for robbing Eisav of his future, they share a soft and brotherly moment. Yaakov characterizes this moment as *vatirzeini*. Thus, following the Gr”a’s rule the context supports that *verotziso* would mean you have made peace and we have been reconciled.

One should not be surprised that our entire discussion is found in the understudied comment of Rashi on the *pasuk* marking the reconciliation of Eisav and Yaakov:

Vatirtzeini: you have become reconciled to me. Similarly every term of ratzon in Scripture [means] appeasement, [apeiement in Old French], as in "It shall not be acceptable for you" [because] sacrifices serve to appease and to conciliate. Similarly, "The lips of the righteous know ratzon," [meaning:] they know how to appease and conciliate.

Rashi Bereishit 33:10

ותרצוני - נתפייסת לי, וכן כל רצון
שבמקרא לשון פיוס, אפיימינ"ט בלע"ז
[פיוס] (ויקרא כב כ) כי לא לרצון יהיה
לכם, הקרבנות באות לפייס ולרצון, וכן
(משלי י לב) שפתי צדיק ידעון רצון,
יודעים לפייס ולרצות:
רש"י בראשית לג:

Rashi marshals further support as he demonstrates that the seeking *ratzon* is the goal of many a sacrifice, a *korban*.

The Verotziso of Shabbos

And, you may ask what should we have in mind every Shabbos during Kiddush when we say “*rotziso bonu*”. Perhaps we are to recall that even the Shabbos had a “rocky” start with *Klal Yisrael*. Both the blessings of Shabbos and its blessed restrictions were revealed through the manna (מן), that is memorialized through the double *challos* on the table. We may well recall that there were those who questioned the blessings of the double portion of *man* as well as the restrictions against collecting it on Shabbos. Nevertheless, the blessings of Shabbos and the blessings of the manna continued seamlessly. Shabbos too gives us reason to say “ורצית בנו”!!

The Patient and the Caretaker: On Sukkot and Compassion

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The Mishnah (*Sukkah* 25a) rules that “*cholin u-meshamsheihen peturim min ha-Sukkah*,” the sick and their caregivers are exempt from the *mitzvah* of Sukkah. The Gemara (26a) goes on to clarify that this leniency applies not only to one who finds himself in a serious condition, but even to one experiencing mere discomfort in his eyes or head. Furthermore, the Gemara (*ibid.*) introduces as well the category of the *mitzta'er*, one who is exempted from the *mitzvah* of Sukkah due to some physical discomfort resulting from conditions in the Sukkah. Nevertheless, only the *mitzta'er* himself is exempted, not his caregivers.

Intriguingly, the Gemara offers no reason for these exemptions. Despite the Gemara’s silence on this issue, the commentators are nearly⁵⁶ unanimous regarding the cases of the *choleh* and *mitzta'er*: both are exempted on the basis of the principle, “*teshvu ke’ein taduru*,” which teaches that one is only required to sit in the Sukkah in the way that one sits in his home.⁵⁷ Just as the *choleh* and *mitzta'er* would go elsewhere if they were uncomfortable at home,⁵⁸ so too they are not obligated to sit in the Sukkah. The exemption of *meshamshei choleh*, however, seems far less clear. What is the basis of this *petur*?

One view indicates that *meshamshin* are in fact a subset of the *mitzta'er* category. One who is paid to care for the ill is psychologically distracted by his professional responsibility toward the

⁵⁶ Rav Elchanan Wasserman (*Kovetz Shiurim* 2:46:1) suggests that according to some Geonim, a *choleh* is *patur* because he is involved in healing himself, and is therefore exempted on the basis of the rule *osek be-mitzvah patur min ha-mitzvah*. According to this view, the *choleh* would be exempt not only from Sukkah but from all *mitzvot*. This position, however innovative, remains outside the mainstream understanding of our *sugya*.

⁵⁷ Tosafot, *Sukkah* 26a (s.v. *holchei*) invokes *teshvu ke’ein taduru* in relation to *mitzta'er*. Ritva (25a s.v. *cholin*), Rabbenu Manoach, *Hilchot Sukkah* 6:2, and *Mishnah Berurah* (O.C. 640 *se’if katan* 6) do the same for the *choleh*. Meiri (25a s.v. *cholim*) and Bartenura (*Mishnah, Sukkah* 2:4 s.v. *cholin*) apply *teshvu ke’ein taduru* to both *choleh* and *mitzta'er*.

⁵⁸ See *Mishnah Berurah* (O.C. 640 *se’if katan* 9) who asserts that the *choleh* is only exempted if he is more comfortable in his home than in the Sukkah. This is also implicit in Ritva (25a s.v. *cholin*). *Edut le-Yaakov* (*siman* 2 s.v. *hinei*), however, maintains that the *choleh* is exempt whether or not he is more comfortable in his home.

choleh and is therefore considered a *mitzta'er* (*Shvut Yaakov* 3:47,⁵⁹ quoted in *Sha'arei Teshuvah* O.C. 640:3). This approach, however, seems difficult, as not all caretakers would seem to fall under this category. It would seem more reasonable to judge each assistant on a case-by-case basis. Moreover, this view, at least as presented by the *Shvut Ya'akov*, would not account for the exemption of a voluntary caregiver.

A second, more prevalent approach is to subsume *meshamshin* under the rubric of *osek be-mitzvah patur min ha-mitzvah*, “one who is involved in one *mitzvah* is exempted from another *mitzvah*.” Indeed, this interpretation is offered by a number of prominent *acharonim*: the *Levush* (O.C. 640:3), *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* (ibid. 640:7) and *Mishnah Berurah* (ibid. *se'if katan* 7).

However, this perspective encounters difficulties of its own. The face reading of the Gemara would seem to indicate that the exemption of *meshamshei cholin* applies whether or not the assistant is compensated for his services. It is not clear, however, that one who is being paid would fall under the rubric of *osek be-mitzvat bikkur cholim*. Apparently, the Gemara may extend the *petur* of *meshamshin* beyond the scope of *osek be-mitzvah*.

Furthermore, if *meshamshin* fall under the rubric of *osek be-mitzvah*, we should similarly exempt them from many other *mitzvot*, at least those that conflict with caregiving. For example, a caregiver should be exempted from *tefilla*, as praying severely limits the assistant's ability to care for the sick. Indeed, Rav Elchanan Wasserman (*Kovetz Shiurim* 2:46:1) quotes a Geonic responsum which rules that *meshamshei choleh* are exempted from *tefilla*! This conclusion, however, seems difficult to swallow. The Mishnah and Gemara limit their discussion to the exemption from *Sukkah*, seemingly implying that the *petur* does not extend to other areas of *halakha*.

Based on some of these objections and others, *Aruch LaNer* (26a s.v. *be-Gemara choleh*), *Aruch Hashulchan* (O.C. 640:3-4) and Rav Yosef Engel (*Gilyonei HaShas Sukkah*, 26a s.v. *ela*) offer a third interpretation: the basis for the *petur meshamshin* is the very same principle that exempts the *choleh*, namely *teshvu ke'ein taduru*. In the words of the *Aruch HaShulchan*:

*It would appear to me that everything falls under the category of sitting [in the Sukkah] as one lives. Just as one whose house is difficult for his health leaves his home, so too [he may leave his] Sukkah. And just as caretakers leave their homes and sit next to the sick, so too [they may leave their] Sukkah.*⁶⁰

ונ"ל דזהו הכל בכלל תשבו כעין תדורו
דכשם שהאדם שדירתו קשתה לו
לבריאותו יצא מדירתו כמו כן בסוכה
וכמו שמשמשי החולה עוזבים ביתם
ויושבים אצל החולה כמו כן בסוכה.

⁵⁹ 3:51 in the most recent edition.

⁶⁰ In addition to the various cases described above, there may be another interesting *nafka minah*, halakhic implication, of the various approaches to the *petur meshamshin*. The Meiri (26a s.v. *Chachmei*) quotes the Chachmei Lunel, who maintain that the *meshamshin* are only exempted at moments when they actually care for the *choleh*. The Beit Yosef (O.C. 640) quotes this position in the name of the Orchot Chaim, and in *Shulchan Aruch* (O.C. 640:3) quotes his view as a “*yesh mi she'omer*” without a dissenting opinion. The Meiri himself disagrees, claiming that *meshamshin* are exempted even when they are not providing actual services, because they never know when they will be called upon to assist the *choleh*. It is possible that his approach is contingent upon the various understandings of the *petur meshamshin*. If the exemption is based upon *osek be-mitzvah* we might limit the exemption to those times in which he is actually preoccupied in the performance of the *mitzvah*. However, one who

In light of the above approaches to the exemption of the *meshamshin*, let us now consider a perplexing passage in the Tosafot HaRosh (ad. loc.):

Both the sick and his caretakers are exempt. Even though he is able to sleep without his caretaker, in order to give him psychological comfort they were lenient to allow the caretaker to sleep [near] him.

חולה הוא ומשמשו פטור. אף על
גב דאיפשר לו לישן בלא
משמשו הקילו לנחת רוח ל
להיות משמשו ישן עמו.

At first glance the Rosh's words are astounding. The term "*hikilu*," "they were lenient," written in the plural, seems to indicate that it was the rabbis who were lenient rather than the Torah itself. This, however, is quite difficult. Our *sugya* addresses an exemption from a Biblical commandment. It is the Torah that must exempt the *meshamshin*, not the rabbis! Furthermore, the term "they were lenient" implies that we are bending over backward to make the *choleh* as comfortable as possible. This attempt at leniency, while noble, seems misplaced. Either it is important for the patient's needs that the *meshamshin* sleep nearby, in which case the caretaker should be exempted, or it is not important that the assistant be present, in which case he should be obligated. What room is there for leniency?

It seems that Tosafot HaRosh is hinting to a novel and critical thesis. Let us assume for the sake of argument that Tosafot HaRosh follows the view that the exemption of *meshamshin* is based on *teshvu ke'ein taduru*, which, as we argued above, seems to be the simplest understanding. If so, we must determine just how expansively we are to define this category. What degree of discomfort qualifies for *mitzta'er* or *choleh*? What if some in this situation would leave their homes while others would not? The outer limits of *teshvu ke'ein taduru* leave much room for interpretation.

It is perhaps to this question that the Rosh addresses himself. What is the status of *meshamshei choleh*? Their presence next to the *choleh* is not crucial; it is only slightly beneficial. Do they fall under the exemption of *teshvu ke'ein taduru* or not? Due to this ambiguity, the Rosh implies the following *chiddush*: in such borderline cases, **Chazal were offered a certain degree of latitude in determining whether certain individuals are obligated or exempted**. This is known as *mesaruha ha-katuv la-Chachamim*. In other words, with regard to certain *mitzvot* Chazal were empowered to "fill in the blanks" and determine whether or not a Biblical law applies in a particular circumstance.⁶¹ The Rosh claims that one such circumstance is *meshamshei choleh*. Chazal themselves decided to rule leniently and exempt the caretaker, in order to ensure the psychological comfort of the *choleh*. If this reading is correct, the Rosh's comments would appear to offer a remarkable window into the rabbis' far-reaching compassion and consideration for the needs of the sick.

adopts the *teshvu ke'ein taduru* approach might be more inclined toward the position of the Meiri, extending the exemption even beyond the time when services are actually rendered.

⁶¹ For example, the Gemara invokes this concept in relation to *chol hamo'ed* (*Chagiga* 18a) and *bechor* (*Bechorot* 26b). Other famous cases in which the *rishonim* invoke this concept include the *inuyim* (aside from eating and drinking) on Yom Kippur (*Ran 1a be'alfas*) and the 39 *melachot* (*Yereim, Mitzvah* 274). Fascinatingly, the Rosh himself (*Sukkah* 3:14) invokes *mesaruha ha-katuv la-Chachamim* in connection with various disqualifications of the four species.

Our reading of the Rosh, however, leaves one stone unturned. After all, is it a mere coincidence that *Chazal* exercised this right specifically in the case of Sukkah? It would seem likely that this leniency reflects the specific nature of the *mitzvah* to dwell in the Sukkah.

The Ritva (28b s.v. *ha'eizrach*) poses a simple question: Why does the Torah instruct that every “*eizrach*,” citizen, must sit in the Sukkah (Vayikra 23:42)? Why doesn't the Torah invoke the more common term “*ish*,” “man?” The Ritva answers:

I heard in the name of our great rabbi Nachmanides, may he rest in peace, that it comes to teach us that one is not obligated in Sukkah unless he is like a refreshed citizen, which excludes travelers, guards of fruit [orchards], one who is uncomfortable, and similar cases. And whenever we invoke “teshvu ke'ein taduru” we derive it from here, for this verse reveals to us that when it says “you shall sit” it does not mean any sitting, rather [it means] sitting as one would dwell...

שמעתי בשם רבינו הגדול הרמב"ן
ז"ל שבא לומר שלא יתחייב בסוכה
אלא מי שהוא כאזרח רענן פרט
להולכי דרכים ושומרי פירות
ומצטער וכיוצא בהן, וכל מאי
דאמרינן בכל דוכתא תשבו כעין
תדורו מהכא נפקא לן, דהאי קרא גלי
לן דמאי דכתיב תשבו אינה ישיבה כל
דהוא אלא ישיבה כעין דירה...

Ritva sets forth a foundational principle: only the “*eizrach ra'anan*,” one who truly enjoys his stay in the Sukkah, is obligated in this *mitzvah*.

Why should this be? The purpose of Sukkah is not merely to recall that Hashem protected us during our journey in the desert; it is also to remember that Hashem ensured our comfort throughout that time. He not only warded off our enemies and gave us *man* to eat; he ensured we would be comfortable and could enjoy the taste of any food we preferred.

The Midrash (*Shir HaShirim Rabba* 4:11, quoted by Rashi Devarim 8:4) portrays the *ananei ha-kavod* as having cleaned and pressed the Jews' clothing so that *Klal Yisrael* would enjoy comfortable clothing throughout their sojourn. We know that according to one prominent view (Rabbi Akiva, *Sukkah* 11b; Rashi Vayikra 23:42) the Sukkot in which we sit commemorate the *ananei ha-kavod*. This Midrash therefore confirms that the Sukkot represent not only Hashem's protection but also his love and compassion. It is for this reason that this Midrash appears specifically in *Shir HaShirim*.

In light of Ritva's comment we may return to Tosafot HaRosh. Perhaps the Rosh is not merely suggesting that *Chazal* were lenient with regard to the *meshamshin*. He is claiming that unless one can be completely comfortable in the Sukkah there is no obligation, for the symbolism of the Sukkah has been lost. Therefore *Chazal* bent over backward to excuse the caregiver from this obligation, in order to afford “*nachat ruach*” for the patient.

The exemption of *meshamshei cholin*, then, at least according to the interpretation of Tosafot HaRosh, reflects fundamental principles concerning both the Torah's treatment of the sick and the symbolism of the Sukkah. *Chazal*'s compassion for the physical and especially the psychological needs of the sick led them to utilize their unique interpretive powers to rule leniently with regard to the caretakers of the ill. Furthermore, that sensitivity reflects on the purpose of the *mitzvah* to dwell in the Sukkah: we are only required to dwell in the Sukkah as an “*eizrach ra'anan*.” The Sukkah symbolizes not only God's protection of the Jews in a vulnerable

state but also, as an outgrowth of His love and compassion, his means of ensuring that *klal yisrael's* journey would be as comfortable as possible. Ultimately, both points underscore the same fundamental theme: the care and compassion for the vulnerable that is so central to Jewish living and tradition. This Sukkot, may we successfully integrate that compassion into our personal lives, thereby emulating the remarkable standard set by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and *Chazal*.

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Galbanum, Madison, and Citron

The Lesson and the Laws of the Binding of the *Arbah Minim*

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You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a citron tree, the branches of date palms, twigs of a plaited tree, and brook willows; and you shall rejoice before Hashem, your God, for seven days.

Vayikra 23:40 (Translation from Stone Chumash.)

ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון
פרי עץ הדר כפת תמרims וענף
עץ עבת וערבי נחל ושמחתם
לפני ה' אלהיכם שבעת ימים:
ויקרא כג: מז

The Torah instructs us to “take” an *etrog*, *lulav*, *hadasim*, and *aravot* on *Sukkot*. How should one take these four species, together or separately? The Talmud⁶² records a dispute about this question. According to R. Yehuda at least three of the species must be bound together. If one holds them separately, then he will not fulfill the mitzvah. He derives this from a *gezaira shava*—a hermeneutical principle which allows us to derive laws from two seemingly unrelated topics. However, the *Chachamim* disagree. They reject this *gezaira shava* and maintain that it is not absolutely essential that the *lulav*, *hadassim* and *aravot* be tied together. Nevertheless, they agree that doing so is recommended as it beautifies the mitzvah. We follow the view of the *Chachamim* that tying is not necessary but preferable; therefore, we tie our *lulav* together with the *hadassim* and *aravot*. (A summary of the laws that pertain to the binding of the *lulav* can be found in the appendix to this article.)

Let’s try to understand the nature of this debate. Rav Yehuda seems to understand that the four species are meant to be held as one unit; thus, they must be bound. But what about the *Chachamim*; if they maintain each species is meant to stand alone then why is it considered more beautiful to bind them together? It is not at all obvious why a flimsy string makes the mitzvah

⁶² תלמוד בבלי מסכת סוכה דף לג. : דתניא: לולב, בין אגוד בין שאינו אגוד כשר, רבי יהודה אומר: אגוד כשר, שאינו אגוד - פסול. מאי טעמא דרבי יהודה? יליף לקיחה לקיחה מאגודת אגוד. כתיב הכא (ויקרא כג) ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון וכתוב התם (שמות יב) ולקחתם אגדת אגוד, מה להלן אגודה - אף כאן אגודה. - ורבנן: לית להו לקיחה לקיחה. מאן תנא להא, דתנו רבנן: לולב מצוה לאוגדו, ואם לא אגדו - כשר. מני? אי רבי יהודה - כי לא אגדו אמאי כשר? אי רבנן - מאי מצוה קא עביד? - לעולם רבנן, מצוה משום (שמות טו) זה אלי ואנוהו.

more beautiful. Why can't I decide how to beautify the mitzvah as I do when I decorate my sukkah?

Perhaps we can answer this question by considering the symbolism of the *arba minim*. The Midrash⁶³ records that each of the four species represents a different type of Jew:

1. The *etrog* tree, which has a fruit with both a fine taste and fragrant aroma, reflects the person who excels both in Torah and good deeds.
2. The *lulav* which comes from a tree with a fruit with a delicious taste, the date, but no aroma represents a person who has mastered Torah but lacks good deeds.
3. The *hadasim* which smell good but lack fruit reflect the opposite—a person with good deeds but lacking Torah scholarship.
4. And finally, the *aravot*, which lack both smell and taste, represent the Jew who (*nebech*) lacks both Torah and good deeds.

The Midrash implies, that the beauty in binding together of the species reflects the beauty in unity and celebration of diversity. All sorts of people, each with their own strengths should merge and unite. This is the **beauty** of the bound *lulav*.

However, an obvious question arises—why is the *etrog* not bound together with the other species? According to our theory this would seem to imply an exclusionary or elitist model; one in which the greatest person remains aloof and separate from everyone else.

Here too, however, we can turn to the *halacha* to help us with the symbolism. The *Shulchan Aruch* rules that when shaking the *lulav* one must unite the *etrog* with the *lulav* and hold them together.⁶⁴ The Gra on *Shulchan Aruch* notes the source for each *halacha* in the *Shulchan Aruch*. What then is the source for the requirement that we hold the *etrog* together with the other species when shaking them—the very Midrash that we quoted about how the four species represent four types of people.⁶⁵ In other words, the reason why one must make sure that they hold the *lulav* and *etrog* together when performing the mitzvah is to stress that the scholar is not meant to be aloof or separate—on the contrary, he should be together with everyone else all bound together.⁶⁶

⁶³ **ויקרא רבה (וילנא) פרשת אמור פרשה ל: ד"א פרי עץ הדר אלו ישראל מה אתרוג זה יש בו טעם ויש בו ריח כך ישראל יש בהם בני אדם שיש בהם תורה ויש בהם מעשים טובים כפות תמרים אלו ישראל מה התמרה הזו יש בו טעם ואין בו ריח כך הם ישראל יש בהם שיש בהם תורה ואין בהם מעשים טובים וענף עץ עבות אלו ישראל מה הדס יש בו ריח ואין בו טעם כך ישראל יש בהם שיש בהם מעשים טובים ואין בהם תורה וערבי נחל אלו ישראל מה ערבה זו אין בה טעם ואין בה ריח כך הם ישראל יש בהם בני אדם שאין בהם לא תורה ולא מעשים טובים ומה הקב"ה עושה להם לאבדן אי אפשר אלא אמר הקב"ה יוקשרו כולם אגודה אחת והן מכפרין אלו על אלו ואם עשיתם כך אותה שעה אני מתעלה הה"ד (עמוס ט) הבונה בשמים מעלותיו ואימתי הוא מתעלה כשהן עשויין אגודה אחת שנאמר (עמוס ט') ואגודתו על ארץ יסדה לפיכך משה מזהיר לישראל ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון.**

⁶⁴ **שולחן ערוך אורח חיים הלכות לולב תרנא:יא: צריך לחבר האתרוג ללולב בשעת נענועו ולנענע בשניהם יחד.**

⁶⁵ **ביאור הגר"א אורח חיים תרנא: יא: צריך לחבר כו'. כמ"ש במדרש מה אתרוג זה יש בו טעם ויש בו ריח כו'.**

⁶⁶ I assume that the reason that we do not actually tie it together is because that would be too cumbersome.

Nevertheless, to accentuate the beauty of unity we must make sure that all the species are held together. Perhaps, however, the motivation is not purely technical. While the Torah scholar is supposed to join the community in doing mitzvot, there are times when he must also remain apart.

The motif of unity as reflected in the binding of the species appears frequently in Jewish literature. Let us consider one more remarkable source that will help us understand the nature of the unity that we seek—why it’s so important and what it truly represents.

One of the offerings brought daily in the Temple was the sweet-smelling incense offering or *ketoret*. The Talmud notes that one of the ingredients did not actually smell good:

Any fast that does not include the sinners of Israel [in its prayer services] is not a fast. Because the galbanum had a foul smell and was nevertheless included in the spices of the ketoret.

Keritot 6b

א"ר חנא בר בונא א"ר שמעון חסידא
 כל תענית שאין בה ממושעי ישראל
 אינה תענית שהרי חלבנה ריחה רע
 ומנאה הכתוב עם סממני קטרת
כריתות ו:

According to the Talmud, *chelbona* or galbanum produced a foul odor. The spice was nevertheless included in the incense offering of the Temple service. Thus, the Talmud deduces that just as the incense offering is invalid without the galbanum, so too “every fast that does not include the criminals of Israel is not a fast.” While this passage is frequently understood either as a concession for the participation of sinners or as a general call for unity in the service of God⁶⁷, Rabbi Nissim (Ran) ben Reuben of Girona (c. 1310-1376) in his *Drashot* (homilies) interprets the reference as a requirement that malefactors contribute to all social endeavors, for without them even the service of the righteous is incomplete.⁶⁸

Why? Because the reprobate’s contribution is essential to the community. To prove this Ran turns to Aristotelian physics. A pure element (earth, water, air, or fire) is inherently unstable. Only when compounded with other elements does a substance prove sustainable. Even a higher element such as fire must contain at least traces of subordinate elements to endure. Likewise, a community, in order to achieve viability, must incorporate all elements of society, even those which on their own are undesirable.

The novelty of Ran’s attitude becomes clearer when compared to that of Maimonides.⁶⁹ Rambam assert that each individual must seek the golden mean of a particular character trait. While Rambam concedes that sometimes one must favor an extreme in order to counterbalance one’s natural disposition⁷⁰, his formulation focuses on moderation in the individual—“The straight” and appropriate path, according to Maimonides, involves acquiring:

[T]he midpoint temperament of each and every trait that man possesses. This refers to the temperament which is equidistant from each of the extremes, without being close to either of them. Therefore, the early sages

הדרך הישרה היא מדה בינונית שבכל דעה
 ודעה מכל הדעות שיש לו לאדם, והיא הדעה
 שהיא רחוקה משתי הקצוות ריחוק שוה ואינה
 קרובה לא לזו ולא לזו, לפיכך צוו חכמים

⁶⁷ See, for example, R. Bachya (*Ki Tisa* 30:34), *Machzor Vitri* 364, *Tur* (*Orach Chayim* 619), *Maharsha* (*Chidushai Aggadot Menachot* 27a), *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 55:11), *Pri Migadim* (*Orach Chayim* 55:11), *Mishnah Berura* (55:46-47), *Igrot Mosheh* (*II Orach Chayim* 19 and *I OraCh Chayim* 23), *Yabia Omer* (7:16), *Haichal Yitzchak* (*Orah Hayim* 2), and *Sichat Mussar* (p. 38). See also *Menachot* 27a.

⁶⁸ First *drasha*; see “Liberal Democratic Themes in Nissim of Girona” by Warren Zev Harvey in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature III* ed. Isadore Twersky and Jay Harris (Harvard UP: Cambridge, 2000).

⁶⁹ *Eight Chapters*, IV, and *Mishneh Torah*, Deot chapters 1 and 2.

⁷⁰ *Mishneh Torah*, Deot 2:2

instructed that man constantly evaluate his traits to calculate them and direct them towards the middle path so that he will achieve perfection.

Mishneh Torah, Deot 1:4

הראשונים שיהא אדם שם דעותיו תמיד
ומשער אותם ומכוין אותם בדרך האמצעית
כדי שיהא שלם בגופו
רמב"ם הלכות דעות א:ד

Ran, on the other hand, seeks moderation within the community thereby allowing diversity within mankind.⁷¹ As such it must incorporate different extremes which will counterbalance each other, thereby leading to the ideal position. For example:

If there is one group of individuals who all have the vice of parsimoniousness, and another group who all have the vice of profligacy, the activities of the combined group as a whole will be more perfect than those of the individuals, just as is said regarding the elements.⁷²

Later, he posits that this variety forms the basis for friendship; one must seek companionship in order to broaden his horizons.

Thus, according to Ran, plurality is not only tolerated—it is mandated. Only by incorporating all elements of society does the possibility exist for reaching the ideal mean.⁷³ Without the inclusion of the extremes a people will necessarily tend towards extremism. As such the Torah values the inclusion of sinners in fasts not as an act of mercy but by necessity. Ran takes the Galbanum parable to its ultimate conclusion, arguing that the Galbanum allows the other spices to achieve their latent potential; “it stimulates and actualizes the other spices arousing their aroma.”⁷⁴

Sukkot is a time when we consider the contribution of the Jewish people to the broader world. That is why, for example, we offer seventy bulls as *korbanot* on sukkot, to sustain the seventy nations of the world.⁷⁵ In that light, let us consider an extraordinary parallel. James Madison in “Federalist No. 10” utilized many of these very same arguments that Ran offers in his *Drashot*.

Several of those participating in the constitutional convention of 1787 argued against the formation of a centralized government, fearing that it would include too many “factions.” Madison, in what was likely the most important of the federalist papers, countered, arguing that the stability of the republic rested on the inclusion of multiple and even divisive factions:

As long as the reason of man continues fallible, and he is at liberty to exercise it, different opinions will be formed. As long as the connection subsists between his reason and his self-love, his opinions and his passions will have a reciprocal influence on each other.

⁷¹ This notion accords with numerous sources which highlight the uniqueness of each individual; “Just as the countenances of different people vary so to their opinions vary” (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 21.1). Maharal (R. Judah Loew; 1525-1609, Prague) goes even further in his praise of individuality stipulating that this multiplicity of personalities necessarily leads to the diversity of correct opinions within Torah.

⁷² *Derashot ha-Ran*. p. 4-5.

⁷³ R. Samuel Eliezer Edels (Maharsha; 1555-1631, Poland) likewise argues that only the debate between discordant positions can lead to the recognition of the truth (*Chidushai Aggadot; Chagiga* 3b).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 8.

⁷⁵ *Sukkah* 55b. The Midrash states that if the nations had realized how much they benefited from these offerings, they would have sent armies to protect Jerusalem from attack.

In this famous passage Madison unknowingly⁷⁶ duplicates the argument of Ran for including the disparate elements of society. The “reciprocal influence” described by the Federalist is the counterbalance between the hoarder and spender depicted by the Talmudist.

In addition, Madison procures another idea from his medieval predecessor. Ran admits a weakness in his scheme of inclusion. If there is no counterbalance, admittance of extreme positions can prove disastrous:

Behold it is true regarding natural phenomena and human nature that everything is strengthened and increased when it is joined by that which is similar to it. It should also be the case regarding inferior and deficient qualities, namely, that the bad characteristic is strengthened when multiplied. This is the absolute truth, however, only under one condition, namely, that the vice in question is identical in each individual. For example, if one person with the characteristic of stinginess, a bad trait, is joined by another with the very same characteristic, that bad characteristic will be strengthened and multiplied.

Thus, while a community with a miser and spendthrift is strengthened by the inclusion of these two individually deficient people, a community which only incorporates members with one extreme will be misguided. Consequently, Ran’s plan relies on a large populace to assure the realization of a moderate and superior position.⁷⁷

Madison makes the very same argument regarding the advantage of a larger union:

The smaller the society, the fewer probably will be the distinct parties and interests composing it... Extend the sphere, and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens; or if such a common motive exists, it will be more difficult for all who feel it to discover their own strength, and to act in unison with each other.

Having some minorities, argues Madison, proves dangerous. Only with the incorporation of multiple factions are you guaranteed that man’s “opinions and his passions will have a reciprocal influence on each other.”

According to modern scholars history proved Ran (and Madison) right. Joseph Ellis writes in *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 2000):

The achievement of the revolutionary generation was a collective enterprise that succeeded because of the diversity of personalities and ideologies present in the mix. Their interactions and juxtapositions generated a dynamic form of balance and equilibrium, not because any of them was perfect or infallible, but because their mutual imperfections and fallibilities, as well as their eccentricities and excesses, checked each other” (17).

I cannot think of a more eloquent articulation of Ran’s idea.

⁷⁶ According to researchers at the Jefferson Library in Monticello, VA, Madison did not have access to *Drashot HaRan*.

⁷⁷ Despite this Ran cautions against the formation of a single global state, like that proposed by William of Ockham, as it would close the opportunity for a malcontent or persecuted citizen from fleeing to another country. This argument also would almost certainly have found favor in the eyes of America’s founding fathers.

Appendix

Having considered the symbolism of the binding of the *lulav* let us review some of the laws.

1. One can bind the species together using anything. A rubber band or a piece of string is fine.⁷⁸ We have a custom to use the leaves of the *lulav*; however, this is not necessary.
2. An alternative to tying a knot is to take the *lulav* leaves and make a holder with a section for the *lulav*, *hadassim* and *aravos*. This does the same thing as tying because it binds the three species together and is also fine. Thus, having the holder and a loop seems redundant, but certainly does not hurt.
3. If one ties, the knot should be a permanent knot; not just a half-knot or slip knot. If one forgot to tie a permanent knot before Yomtov then one may tie a half knot or slip knot on Yomtov, as one may not tie or even tighten a permanent knot on Yomtov.⁷⁹
4. Thus, if one is tying a knot, before Yomtov you can simply take one of the loose leaves from the *lulav* wrap it around and tie a double knot. Some have the custom of making a more elaborate knot in which the leaf is wrapped around and through several times.
5. There is a custom to have three loops to correspond to Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov.
6. According to the *Taz*, the bottom loop, which binds the *lulav* to the *haddasim* and *arravot* counts as one of the three; therefore only two more around the *lulav* are necessary.⁸⁰
7. According to the *Elya Rabba* one should have three loops in addition to the loop which binds all three species. Thus, there will be a total of 4 loops.⁸¹
8. One must be able to shake their *lulav* such that the leaves have room to flap; therefore, the top loop should be at least four inches from the top of the *lulav*.⁸²

⁷⁸שולחן ערוך אורח חיים תרנא:א: ויכול לאגדם במין אחר משנה ברורה תרנא:ט: במין אחר - ולית ביה משום בל תוסיף דכיון דאין חובה לאגדו האי לחודיה קאי והאי לחודיה קאי ומשום חציצה נמי ליכא אף שהקשר מפסיק בין ידו להלולב דכל לנאותו אינו חוצץ ואפילו אם הקשר היה בדבר שאינו מינו: ⁷⁹שולחן ערוך אורח חיים תרנא:א: ומצוה לאגדם בקשר גמור, דהיינו ב' קשרים זה על זה, משום נוי ואם לא אגדו מבעוד יום, או שהותר אגודו, אי אפשר לאגדו בי"ט בקשר גמור, אלא אגדו בעניבה. ⁸⁰ט"ז אורח חיים תרנא:א: ועכ"פ נרא' דהקשר של מטה דהיינו מה שקשר כל הג' מינים ביחד משום נוי הוא נחשב לא' ויעשה למעלה עוד שנים אם אפשר לו: ⁸¹משנה ברורה תרנא:יד: ובא"ר משמע ג' קשרים בלולב עצמו לבד הקשר הד' שאוגד הג' מינים יחד ואם לא נאגד אלא אגד אחת כשר. ⁸²ט"ז אורח חיים תרנא:א: ותמוה לי דהא צריך לכסס העליון וקשר זה מעכב הכסס ע"כ צריך לעשות בענין שיוכל לכסס היטב:

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