

# From Too Particular to Too Universal and Back Again

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The two major holidays that bookend the Jewish year are Pesach and Sukot. These weeklong festivals commence exactly half a year apart from one another and are in some ways polar opposites, while at the same time are inextricably linked in law and philosophy. This article will attempt to reflect on the fundamental philosophies that unite and divide these two celebrations. Chazal highlight this connection through the application of the “*gezeira shava Tu-Tu*,” the exegetical tool that enables the transposition of the laws of Sukot to Pesach and vice versa. We will see that this legal mechanism is responsible for many of the fundamental laws of the holidays and represents the spiritual and philosophical underpinnings as well.

The basic obligation to eat in a suka on the first night of Sukot is based on this connection:

*R. Yochanan said in the name of R. Shimon b. Yehotzadak, it says here (regarding Sukot) the fifteenth and it says regarding Pesach the fifteenth. Just as there is an obligation to eat matza on the first night of Pesach and the rest of the holiday it is optional, similarly we must eat bread in the suka on the first night of Sukot and the rest of the holiday it is optional.*

אמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון  
בן יהוּצדק נאמר כאן חמשה עשר  
ונאמר חמשה עשר בהג המצות  
מה להלן לילה הראשון חובה  
מכאן ואילך רשות אף כאן לילה  
הראשון חובה מכאן ואילך רשות  
מסכת סוכה דף כז.

Much halachic literature has been devoted to the exploration of the precise parameters of this connection. Some *rishonim* insist that the amount of bread necessary to be eaten on the eve of Sukot is an olive’s volume, mirroring the volume of matza that must be consumed on the first of Pesach, while others require an egg’s volume, consistent with the general principles of the laws of suka.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ran in *Brachot* folio 12b (of the Rif) d.h. *Matnitin*.

Similarly, some say that rain exempts one from eating in the suka like the rest of Sukot,<sup>28</sup> while others derive an obligation to eat even in the rain based on the comparison to Pesach.<sup>29</sup> The *Pri Megadim*<sup>30</sup> goes so far as to say that one must eat “water-challah” (bread made of four and water alone) on the first night of Sukot similar to the matza of Pesach (despite the fact that it is chametz!)

The debates revolve around the ambiguity of exactly how similar these holidays are supposed to be and to what extent they maintain their unique individual identities. The same can be said of their philosophical identities. I would like to explore that relationship. How are these two holidays indeed polar opposites and what are their similarities and points of integration?

The prominence of these two holidays and their respective months is illustrated by this Tanaitic debate:

*The Beraita states: R. Eliezer said that the world was created in Tishrei, our forefathers were born in Tishrei and died in Tishrei ... The Jews were redeemed in Nisan and their future redemption will be in Tishrei. R. Yehoshua said that the world was created in Nisan, our forefathers were born in Nisan and died in Nisan ... The Jews were redeemed in Nisan and their future redemption will be in Nisan.*

**Rosh HaShana 10b-11a**

תניא רבי אליעזר אומר בתשרי נברא  
 העולם בתשרי נולדו אבות בתשרי  
 מתו אבות... בניסן נגאלו בתשרי  
 עתידין ליגאל. רבי יהושע אומר  
 בניסן נברא העולם בניסן נולדו אבות  
 בניסן מתו אבות... בניסן נגאלו בניסן  
 עתידין ליגאל  
**מסכת ראש השנה דף י: -יא.**

R. Eliezer believes that the creation of the world occurred in the month of Tishrei, while R. Yehoshua insists that it occurred in Nisan. It goes without saying that their debate is not rooted in the carbon dating of fossils to the closer half-year. It is also not a coincidence that they each believe that the births and deaths of the forefathers occurred in those same months, as well as the date of the future redemption. Clearly, R. Eliezer’s view is predicated on the perspective that Tishrei is the focal month of the year and is therefore most likely to be the time of the most historic events of all time, while R. Yehoshua sees Nisan as the month most apropos for these historic events. Their debate is a reflection on their differing perspectives on the relative importance of these months.

Nisan marks the birth of the Jewish People. This nation was forged through the shared experience of persecution and slavery and through the historic, miraculous redemption from Egypt. The entire month of Nisan is defined by this holiday at its center. Nisan marks the uniqueness of the Jewish People and the particular destiny that it possesses. In this sense, Nisan is the beginning of everything and is therefore designated as the first of the months, as God commanded in Egypt:

*This month should be to you the first of all months. It is the first for you for all of the months of the year.*

**Shemot 12:2**

הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לְכֶם רֵאשִׁית חֳדָשִׁים רֵאשִׁוֹן הוּא  
 לְכֶם לְחֹדֶשֶׁי הַשָּׁנָה:  
**שְׁמוֹת יב: ב**

<sup>28</sup> Tosfot in *Brachot* 49b and *Teshuvot HaRashba*, quoted by *Beit Yosef* in *O.C.* 639.

<sup>29</sup> Rosh in *Brachot* Chapt. 7 siman 23.

<sup>30</sup> *O.C.* 643. See Ran (end of Chapt. 2) of *Sukah* and *Tzalach* (*Pesachim* 108) who dispute this.

We are to calculate our time through the lunar months, beginning with Nisan. The Midrash, however, limits this designation and focuses on the seemingly superfluous, yet insignificant word “*lachem*”:

*“To you the first of all months” - “To you” and not to the nations of the world because the nations of the world count from Tishrei.*

**Pesikta Zutreta, Shemot ch. 12**

“לכם ראש חדשים” - “לכם” - ולא לאומות העולם, שהרי אומות העולם מונין מתשרי פסיקתא זוטרתא (לקח טוב) שמות פרק יב

The Midrash insists that even when other nations follow a lunar calendar, they begin their year with Tishrei. The importance of Nisan is limited to the particular interests of the Jews. With respect to the rest of the world, it is Tishrei that is most significant. Thus we can suggest that Rav Eliezer believes that with respect to the creation of the entire world, the event with the most universal significance, it is Tishrei that is most aptly suited to be its date. Rav Yehoshua, however, sees the world from the perspective of the Jewish People, and sees the unique mission of the Jewish People to be the purpose of creation and therefore dates the creation of world at Nisan. In a sense, perhaps Rav Yehoshua reflects the view of the Midrash, quoted by Rashi in the beginning of the Torah:

*“In the beginning, God created” - This verse demands interpretation, like the interpretation of our rabbis, [the world was created] for the purpose of the Torah which is called “the first path” and for the purpose of the Jewish People who are called “the first crop.”*

**Rashi, Bereishit 1:1**

בראשית ברא - אין המקרא הזה אומר אלא דרשני, כמו שדרשוהו רבותינו ז"ל בשביל התורה שנקראת (משלי ח כב) ראשית דרכו, ובשביל ישראל שנקראו (ירמיה ב ג) ראשית תבואתו.  
רש"י בראשית א:א

The identity of Tishrei is also manifest in the holidays that populate the month. It begins with Rosh HaShana and is centered around Sukot. Throughout Sukot we bring seventy cows in the *musaf* services. The *korban musaf* represents the essence of the *kedushat hayom*, sanctity of the day. In this case, Chazal say:

*R. Elazar said: These seventy cows, correspond to whom? They correspond to the seventy nations.*

**Suka 55b**

אמר רבי (אליעזר) [אלעזר] הני שבעים פרים כנגד מי? כנגד שבעים אומות.  
תלמוד בבלי מסכת סוכה דף נה:

The seventy *korbanot* represent the seventy nations of the world on whose behalf we pray and sacrifice on Sukot. The essence of Sukot is our universal concern for all of the peoples of the world.

This theme of Sukot is also represented by the essential symbol of the holiday: the sukah. The Midrash says that this mitzvah will have application to the non-Jewish community as well. The Midrash states that in the end of days God will give rewards to those who kept his Torah and the nations of the world will claim that they were never given the opportunity to keep the Torah. God will then give them one last chance – and He will choose the mitzvah of sukah for them to perform and test if they are able to sit in the Suka when it is very hot outside.

It is noteworthy that of all of the mitzvot to choose from, it is suka in particular that is chosen for this special test. Why suka? Perhaps this is a reflection of the universal nature of suka, and it is indeed the most relevant one to share with the general population. Additional support for the universal nature of Sukot can be found in the particular laws of the sukah. The halacha is most

stringent with respect to the materials that are valid for *schach* (the roof of the suka) in contrast to the walls, that can be made of anything. In addition, some of the walls can be imaginary, as we derive the requisite dimensions from the laws of eruv and construct our sukot from them. This may represent that fact that the suka focuses on that which unites us, that which is Above, and downplays the walls, the representation of that which divides us.

The essence of Rosh Hashana is that it is the Day of Judgment. The liturgy expresses this theme but is careful to express the universal nature of this judgment:

- *And so, place you fear, God our Lord on all of Your works and your dread on everything You created. All of the works will fear You and all who were created will bow to you. Everyone will create a single group to fulfill Your will whole heartedly.*
- *Our Lord and Lord of our fathers, rule over the entire world with Your honor and be elevated over the whole earth with Your glory. Reveal Yourself with your glorious strength over all inhabitants of the earth and let all that has been made know that You are the Maker and everything that has been fashioned that You were the one Who fashioned ...*
- *Regarding the nations, it is said on this day, which ones will go to war?*
- *This is the day of the creation of the world. On this day, all of the creations of the world will stand judgment.*

- בכּן תּן פּחדך ה' א-לקינו על כל מעשיך, ואימתך על כל מה שבראת. ויראוך כל המעשים וישתחוו לפניך כל הברואים ויעשו כּלם אגדה אחת, לעשות רצונך בלבב שלם...
- א-לקינו וא-לקי אבותינו, מלוך על כל העולם כּלו בכבודך, והנשא על כל הארץ ביקרך, והופע בהדר גאון עזך, על כל יושבי תבל ארצך. וידע כל פעולך כי אתה פעלתו, ויבין כל יצור כי אתה יצרתו....
- ועל המדינות בו יאמר איזו לחרב...
- היום הרת עולם היום יעמוד במשפט כל יצורי עולמים..

The belief that the entire world stands in judgment on this birthday of the world is perfectly consistent with the theme of Tishrei. The basic fact that Rosh HaShana is a day of judgment is based on a midrash quoted in the Talmud:

*On the first of Tishri it is the new year for years. What legal bearing has this? R. Nahman b. Isaac [explained the Mishnah to refer] to the Divine judgment 'as it is written, From the beginning of the year to the end of the year, [which means], From the beginning of the year sentence is passed as to what shall be at the end of it. How do we know that this takes place in Tishri? — Because it is written, Blow the horn at the new moon, at the covered time [keseh] for our feastday. Which is the feast on which the moon is covered over [mithkaseh]? You must say that this is New Year; and it is written [in this connection], For it is a statute for Israel, an ordinance for the God of Jacob ... Another [Baraita] taught: 'For it is a statute for Israel'; this tells me only that Israel [are judged]; how do I know that this applies also to the [other] nations of this world? Because it is written, an ordinance for the God of Jacob'. If that is the case, what is the point of saying, For it is a statute for Israel? — It teaches that Israel are brought up for trial first.*

**Rosh HaShana 8a-8b (adapted from Soncino Translation)**

באחד בתשרי ראש השנה לשנים למאי הלכתא ... רב נחמן בר יצחק אמר לדין דכתיב (דברים יא) "מראשית השנה ועד אחרית שנה" — מראשית השנה נידון מה יהא בסופה. ממאי דתשרי הוא? דכתיב (תהלים פא) "תקעו בחדש שופר בכסה ליום חגנו" איזהו חג שהחדש מתכסה בו הוא אומר זה ראש השנה, וכתיב (תהלים פא) "כי חק לישראל הוא משפט לאלהי יעקב" ... תניא איך כי חק לישראל הוא אין לי אלא לישראל לאומות העולם מנין תלמוד לומר משפט לאלהי יעקב אם כן מה תלמוד לומר כי חק לישראל מלמד שישראל נכנסין תחילה לדין מסכת ראש השנה דף ח-ח:

According to the Talmud, the verse in Psalms refers to Rosh HaShana by the name *kese leyom chagenu* – the “holiday during which the moon is not visible.” Rashi and Tosfot offer different possible interpretations of these words and the application to Rosh HaShana. According to Rashi, it relates to the astronomical view of the moon. Rosh HaShana always occurs on the first day of the lunar month Tishrei, when there is little or no view of the moon. Hence, Rosh HaShana is the (only) biblical holiday that occurs without the moon not-visible in the sky. Tosfot (d.h. *SheHaChodesh*) quotes Rav Meshulam who suggests that the normal *chatat* sacrifice that is brought on Rosh Chodesh is omitted on Rosh HaShana. This is based on the verses in Bamidbar (29:6) that enumerate the sacrifices of Rosh HaShana, and conclude that these sacrifices are offered, “aside from the *ola* of *Rosh Chodesh*” without any mention of the sin offering of *Rosh Chodesh*. Rabenu Tam disputes Rabenu Meshulam and insists that the usual sin offering of Rosh Chodesh is in fact brought on Rosh HaShana, but it is hidden in that it is not mentioned in the verse. In a similar vein, Tosfot offers another interpretation that Rosh HaShana is hidden in that its sacrifices are not mentioned in the Musaf prayers. The common denominator of all of these interpretations is that in some way a fundamental aspect of Rosh Chodesh is hidden on Rosh HaShana. Moreover, it is remarkable that Rosh HaShana is titled and defined by its relationship to Rosh Chodesh. The Psalmist chose to describe Rosh HaShana by the name *kese leyom chagenu*, and the liturgy consistently describe Rosh HaShana in this way throughout the prayers and Kiddush. Why is this holiday defined by this unusual and seemingly minor detail? Why not call it Yom HaDin or Rosh HaShana? In what way does *kese leyom chagenu* become an appropriate name, capturing the essence of the day?

Chazal perceive our lunar calendar to be an expression of the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the Jewish People. The Jewish People are identified by the moon and by our relationship to it, symbolized by Rosh Chodesh. The reason for this is not only because Jews count the months from Nisan, but also because most nations do not follow a lunar cycle at all:

*R. Levi said: The actions of the Jewish People are different than the rest of the world ... In their calendar, the nations of the world use a solar calendar and the Jewish People use a lunar calendar as it states “This month should be to you.”*

**Yalkut Shimoni no. 626**

א"ר לוי כל מעשיהם של ישראל מובדלים מאומות העולם... בבחשבונום שיהיו אומות העולם מונין לחמה וישראל ללבנה שנאמר "החדש הזה לכם" ילקוט שמעוני תורה רמז תרכו

Perhaps the name “*kese leyom chagenu*” indeed captures the essence of the day of Rosh HaShana in that it is the one holiday that occurs on the day that the moon is not visible; it is the one day when the uniqueness of the Jewish People is muted and the dominant concern transcends the unique needs of the Jewish People and relates to all mankind.

Thus the month of Tishrei, defined by Rosh HaShana and Sukot is of universal concern, in contrast to the particularly Jewish identity of Nisan. Nevertheless, Sukot concludes with an independent but related holiday of Shmini Atzeret. This day is defined by Chazal as:

*R. Elazar said: These seventy cows, correspond to whom? They correspond to the seventy nations. What about the individual cow [of Shmini Atzeret]? It corresponds to a single*

אמר רבי (אליעזר) [אלעזר] הני שבעים פרים כנגד מי כנגד שבעים אומות. פר יחידי למה כנגד אומה יחידה

nation. It is comparable to a human king who told his servants "make me a great meal." On the last day, he told his beloved "make me a small me so that I can benefit from your [company].

### Suka 55b

In our efforts to become universally relevant we must also be sure to maintain our unique identity. We therefore remain for one day, Shmini Atzeret, to focus on our unique relationship with God and to affirm our particular commitment to God's Torah. In a similar way, Yom Kippur follows Rosh Hashana in order to balance our focus on our own identity with our concern for all of mankind.

The themes that underlie these cornerstone holidays have parallels in the rabbinic holidays as well. Sukot is very similar to Chanukah, as evident in a number of sources:

*Ulla says, two Amora'im in the west (Eretz Yisrael) argue about this - R' Yossi Bar Avin and R' Yossi bar Zevida - one says that the reasoning of Beit Shammai corresponds to the days yet to come, while the reason of Beit Hillel corresponds to the days that are passing; the other says the reason of Beit Shammai corresponds to the bulls offered on Chag (Sukkot), while Beit Hillel's rationale follows the maxim: "One should always ascend with regard to kedusha and not descend."*

### Shabbat 21b

According to one view of Beit Shamai, the seventy *korban musaf* offerings of Sukot, which define the essence of this universal holiday, are mirrored in the candles of the menorah. Even though we do not light the menorah according to the directions of Beit Shamai, the truth underlying this explanation may be undisputed.

In addition, the dominance of *pirsumei nisa* (publicizing the miracle) is indisputable. The Chanukah menorah is the only *mitzvah* whose function is to publicize something to the public. The menorah is lit in the door or in the window for all to see. Whether *pirsumei nisa* is fulfilled by communicating the story to the non-Jewish population is subject to a dispute amongst halachic deciders, but the simple reading of the Talmud with Rashi indicates that this *mitzva* is defined by the broader community:

*Alternatively, the requisite amount of oil is until the traffic stops in the marketplace. How long is this? Rabbah b. b. Chana said in the name of R. Yochanan: until the the Tarmodeans leave the market.*

### Shabbat 21b

*Tarmodeans- The name of a nation whose people collected small twigs and they would remain in the marketplace until the people of the marketplace went home at night and would light flames in*

משל למלך בשר ודם שאמר לעבדיו  
עשו לי סעודה גדולה ליום אחרון אמר  
לאוהבו עשה לי סעודה קטנה כדי  
שאהנה ממך  
מסכת סוכה דף נה:

אמר עולא פליגי בה תרי אמוראי במערבא ר'  
יוסי בר אבין ור' יוסי בר זבידא חד אמר טעמא  
דב"ש כנגד ימים הנכנסין וטעמא דב"ה כנגד  
ימים היוצאין וחד אמר טעמא דב"ש כנגד פרי  
החג וטעמא דבית הלל דמעלין בקדש ואין  
מורדין אמר רבה בר בר חנה א"ר יוחנן שני  
זקנים היו בצידן אחד עשה כב"ש ואחד עשה  
כדברי ב"ה זה נותן טעם לדבריו כנגד פרי החג  
וזה נותן טעם לדבריו דמעלין בקדש ואין  
מורדין

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף כא:

ואי נמי לשיעורה עד שתכלה רגל מן  
השוק ועד כמה אמר רבה בר בר חנה  
אמר רבי יוחנן עד דכליא ריגלא  
דתרמודאי

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף כא:

רגלא דתרמודאי - שם אומה, מלקטי  
עצים דקים, ומתעכבין בשוק עד  
שהולכים בני השוק לבתיהם  
משחשכה ומבעירים בבתיהם אור,

their home. When the people needed more twigs, they would go out and buy from them (the Tarmodeans).

### Rashi, Shabbat 21b

וכשצריכין לעצים - יוצאים וקונין מהן.  
רש"י מסכת שבת דף כא עמוד ב

In addition, Sukot and Chanukah are the only two holidays that extend for eight days. They are the two times that *hadar* (beauty) is a dominant aspect of the mitzvah<sup>31</sup> and they are both mitzvot that must be done beneath twenty *amot*, in order for people to see the *schach* and the menorah. Moreover, the Rokeach<sup>32</sup> points out that Sukot is described in *Parshat Emor* immediately before the mitzvah of the menorah. Finally, the Book of the Maccabees (2) further highlights the connection between these two holidays by asserting that during the time of the Hasmonaim, they were unable to celebrate Sukot at the correct time and was in fact postponed until after the war, to be celebrated on Chanukah itself.

## Mikdash and Mishkan

Let us now turn our attention to our places of *kedusha*: the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and the Mikdash (Temple). There is a dispute among the *rishonim* regarding the purpose of the Mishkan. Rashi, Shmot 31:18, sees the Mishkan as a means of atoning for the Golden Calf. The implication is that if not for the sin of the Golden Calf, there would be no need for the Mishkan. In a similar vein, Rambam, *More Nevuchim* 3:46, writes that the *korbanot* were not an ideal, but a response to the pagan practices of the time. Ramban, Shmot 25:2, and Vayikra 1:9, writes that both the Mishkan and the *korbanot* are ideal commands that did not merely come as a response to some unfortunate event of the time.

Nevertheless, Rav Menachem Liebttag<sup>33</sup> suggests a very significant qualification. He argues that even if it is true that the Mishkan was not always “meant to be”, the Temple in Jerusalem was always part of God’s divine plan. This is evident from the fact that there has been talk of a *Beit Elokim* in that place since the time of the Avot (Bereishit 28:17). Similarly, the Jews sang of a *mikdash* in the Az Yashir (Shmot 15:17). Moreover, we are commanded in *Parshat Mishpatim* (23:14-17) to visit God three times a year and to be sure not to come empty handed. Clearly there was going to be a place of God in Israel even before the sin of the Golden Calf.

Why the discrepancy? Why is it that the Beit HaMikdash was always considered to be an ideal that we yearned for since the dawn of our history, while the Mishkan was introduced only as a reaction to sins? Weren’t these two structures spiritually one and the same? Indeed, according to the Ramban they were, but perhaps according to Rashi and Rambam they were not. What is the difference?

The Beit HaMikdash is described by the Navi as house of prayer for the entire world:

*Even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer; their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be acceptable upon Mine altar; for My house*

והביאותים אל הר קדשי ושמתים  
בבית תפילתי עולתיהם וזבחייהם לרצון  
על מזבחי כי ביתי בית תפלה יקרא לכל  
העמים:

<sup>31</sup> *Sfat Emet* on Chanukah 5840, fourth paragraph.

<sup>32</sup> Rokeach, Laws of Chanukah, 225

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.tanach.org/shmot/truma/trumas1.htm>

*shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.*

**Yeshayahu 56:7**

*For all peoples- and not just the Jewish People.*

**Rashi, Yeshayahu 56:7**

ישעיהו פרק נו פסוק ז  
לכל העמים - ולא לישראל לבדם:  
רש"י ישעיהו שם

Indeed, we know that sacrifices were offered in the Temple by foreign nations. The Temple of Jerusalem was known throughout the land, and all those who wanted to worship God in a Jewish fashion were welcome into this Temple to serve God. The Mishkan, however, was never to become a “house of prayer for all of the nations.” So long as the Jewish People were a nomadic tribe wandering the desert, the Tabernacle was not going to become an international house of prayer. Perhaps it was for this reason that although the Temple was always our ideal, the temporary Tabernacle was not, and was only constructed in order to provide a response to the sin of the *egel* and to ensure that it would not be repeated.

It is therefore most appropriate that the dedication of the Temple was actually on Sukot:

*And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto king Solomon at the feast, in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month.*

**Melachim I 8:2**

ויקהלו אל המלך שלמה כל איש  
ישראל בנרח האתנים בתג הוא החדש  
השביעי:  
מלכים א פרק ח פסוק ב

The “House of Prayer for all of the Nations” was dedicated on the “holiday of prayer for all of the nations.” However, the Tabernacle, that was to serve the unique needs of the Jewish People during their isolation in the desert, was dedicated in the month on Nisan:

*And it came to pass in the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was reared up.*

**Shmot 40:17**

ויהי בחדש הראשון בשנה השנית באחד  
לחדש הוכם המשכן:  
שמות פרק מז פסוק יז

The second Temple was dedicated before Pesach. However, once Jewish sovereignty was established during the times of the Hasmonaim, and the Temple was rededicated with a chance of re-establishing the type of Temple that the first one was, this dedication occurred on Chanukah, the holiday that is the “second Sukot.”

Judaism is a juggle of the universal mission and the particular; it is a religion that strives to spread its message throughout the world, but must constantly stay close to home in order to maintain its unique identity and commitment. This balance is symbolized by the Menorah – often considered to be the symbol of Judaism – that attempts to shine its light to the entire *reshut harabim*, the entire public domain, but must stay anchored within a handbreadth of the home.<sup>34</sup> In the same way, the major holidays of the year are divided, each focusing on one goal or the other, and the contrast of the Beit HaMikdash with the Mishkan reflects this tension as well. It is the mission of the Jew to live this tension and to best develop the opportunity to illuminate the world while warming one’s self and home at the same time.

<sup>34</sup> Talmud Bavli, *Shabbat* 22a.