

Succot: Celebrating our Dependence

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אנא הושיעה נא!
Please, save us now!³⁵

The tableau of a Jew waving the four species during Succot tells many stories: Different groups of Jews are united in prayer.³⁶ The human body's limbs and organs serve G-d together.³⁷ Foci of our joy are shaken in celebration.³⁸ The four domains of human influence are turned toward G-d.³⁹ Symbols of different Divine gifts are dedicated to G-d.⁴⁰

One midrash, though, sees in our waving a particularly puzzling role: Atonement for the sin committed by Adam and Chavah when they ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. As cited by Rabbi Yonatan Eibeschutz, this midrash says:

'And you shall take for yourself on the first day
[Vayikra 23:40]' – To atone for the first deed.⁴¹ | ו'לקחתם לכם ביום הראשון' – לכפר על מעשה ראשון.

Explanations for the link between this mitzvah and the first human sin range from the mystical to the moral to the pilpulistic,⁴² but one of the major themes of Succot might offer new insight into this opaque rabbinic linkage.

Succot: Holiday of Dependence

All three of our regalim – Pesach, Shavuot and Succot – relate to G-d as Provider. On Pesach, we relive the ancient Divine miracles which created our nation; on Shavuot, we begin bringing the

³⁵ Refrain from the special *hoshanot* prayers of Hoshana Rabbah, the seventh day of Succot

³⁶ *Menachot* 27a.

³⁷ *Vayikra Rabbah* 30:14.

³⁸ *Moreh haNevuchim* 3:43; *Sefer haChinuch*, Mitzvah 324.

³⁹ *Torat ha'Olah* 3:63.

⁴⁰ *Horeb*, Section 31.

⁴¹ I have been unsuccessful in finding this midrash, although various works cite it as *Midrash Rabbah*, and one attributes it to Rashi. Rama's *Torat ha'Olah* (3:63) might present a link; Rama cites a passage from *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Emor* 30) which sees the 'first day' of Vayikra 23:40 as 'the first day of the calculation of sins', and he explains this to refer to the sin which took place on the first day of humanity's existence.

⁴² For example, see *Nefesh Yehonatan* (R' Yonathan Eibeschutz) to *Parshat Emor*, *Maggid Mishneh* (R' Menasheh Klein) to *Parshat Emor*, and *Minchat Yisrael al haTorah v'haMoadim* (R' Yisrael Menachem Keehn).

first of our produce to the Beit haMikdash, thanking G-d for our bounty. On Succot, though, our prayer for rain uniquely expresses our on-going, total dependence upon G-d.

The urgent need expressed on Succot was highlighted by the prophet Zechariah. After depicting an apocalyptic war upon Jerusalem, accompanied by Divine revelation and punishment of the invaders, Zechariah predicted an annual international pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate Succot:⁴³

And all who remain from all of the nations who ascended against Jerusalem will ascend annually to bow to the King, the Lord of hosts, and to celebrate the holiday of Succot. And regarding any from the families of the land who do not ascend to Jerusalem to bow to the King, the Lord of hosts, the rain will not fall upon them.

וְהָיָה כָּל הַנּוֹתֵר מִכָּל הַגּוֹיִם הַבָּאִים עַל יְרוּשָׁלַם וְעָלוּ מִדֵּי שָׁנָה בְּשָׁנָה לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לְמֶלֶךְ ד' צְבָקוֹת וְלַחֹג אֶת חַג הַסִּפּוֹת: וְהָיָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא יַעֲלֶה מֵאֶת מִשְׁפַּחֹת הָאָרֶץ אֶל יְרוּשָׁלַם לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לְמֶלֶךְ ד' צְבָקוֹת וְלֹא עָלֵיהֶם יִהְיֶה הַגֶּשֶׁם:

This holiday is chosen for international tribute because it teaches human dependence upon Divine favor; those who participate in prayers for rain will be blessed with water for their crops, and those who do not will be denied this blessing.⁴⁴

Zechariah's message is echoed in our libations of water in the Beit haMikdash on Succot, as explained by Rabbi Akiva:⁴⁵

Rabbi Akiva said: The Torah says, "Bring a measure of barley on Pesach" at the time of barley, so that the grain will be blessed. "Bring the first wheat on Shavuot" at the time of trees, so that the fruit of trees will be blessed. "Bring water libations on Succot" so that the rains will be blessed. "And regarding any from the families of the land who do not ascend to Jerusalem to bow to the King, the Lord of hosts, the rain will not fall upon them."

אמ' ר' עקיבא אמרה תורה הבא עומר שעורין בפסח שהוא פרק שעורין כדי שתתברך עליך תבואה הביא בכורים חטים בעצרת שהו פרק אילן כדי שיתברכו עליך פירות אילן הביא ניסוך המים בחג כדי שיתברכו עליך מי גשמים ואו' והיה אשר לא יעלה מאת משפחות הארץ אל ירושלים להשתחוות למלך ד' צבקות ולא עליהם יהיה הגשם...

This theme of dependence also drives our annual departure from our homes to reside in the succah. Just as our ancestors relied upon Divine mercy in the wilderness, so we abandon our sturdy structures in favor of tenuous huts and trust in G-d.⁴⁶ And the same theme of trust in G-d is expressed in our mitzvah of waving the four species:⁴⁷

When do we mention rain in our prayers? R' Eliezer said: When we pick up the lulav. R' Yehoshua said: When we

מאימתי מזכירין על הגשמים רבי אליעזר אומר משעת נטילת לולב רבי יהושע אומר

⁴³ Zechariah 14:16-17.

⁴⁴ This explanation is supported by the Tosefta *Succah* 3:18. For additional approaches to the selection of Succot, see *Avodah Zarah* 3a-b and Radak, Zechariah 14:16.

⁴⁵ Tosefta *Succah* 3:18

⁴⁶ Indeed, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch sees in גוי, the name of a nation which rejects this dependence upon G-d, a relationship with גג, meaning roof, the opposite of the Succah. (Commentary to Bamidbar 29:13, and *Collected Writings* Vol. 2 Tishri V).

⁴⁷ Talmud, *Taanit* 2b.

put down the lulav [at the end of Succot]. R' Eliezer explained: This is because these four species come only to gain favor for [the year's] water. Just as these four species cannot exist without water, so too the world cannot exist without water.

משעת הנחתו אמר רבי אליעזר הואיל
וארבעת מינין הללו אינן באין אלא לרצות
על המים וכשם שארבע מינין הללו אי
אפשר בהם בלא מים כך אי אפשר לעולם
בלא מים.

Through its various rituals, Succot marks our dependence upon the Divine.⁴⁸

Adam and Chavah's pursuit of independence

When we wave the lulav, etrog, hadas and aravah to humbly recognize our reliance upon G-d, we atone for Adam and Chavah's act of eating from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

According to Rashi,⁴⁹ Adam and Chavah ate the fruit because they wished to create, in the manner of Divine creation; when the serpent pledged, "You will be like Elokim," he meant that just as G-d creates worlds, so too, they would create worlds.⁵⁰ Adam and Chavah did not wish to rely on the gifts of G-d.

More, a midrash⁵¹ alleges that Adam and Chavah were drawn to the idea of emancipating themselves from Divine control. The original pair of human beings did not trust G-d, and they sought to eliminate the Divine last word over their fate. As explained by Rabbi Yehudah bar Simon, this was the serpent's seductive offer:

Each entity created after another reigns over the other... and Adam was created last, in order to reign over all. Eat first, before He will create other worlds which will reign over you.

כל שנברא אחר חבירו שליט בחבירו... ואדם
נברא אחר הכל לשלוט בכל. קדמו ואכלו עד
שלא יברא עולמות אחרים והן שולטין בכם.

As the *Eitz Yosef* commentary explains, Adam and Chavah planned to eat and become perfect, to such an extent that no subsequent Divine creation could equal them. Our original ancestors understood that their roles in the newly formed universe depended entirely upon Divine mercy, and they ate from the fruit in order to establish independence. On Succot, we reverse their decision by unabashedly acknowledging our reliance upon, and trust in, Hashem.

The Benefit of Succot

⁴⁸ One might suggest that Succot is a necessary precursor for Pesach and Shavuot. To borrow from the *Sh'ma Yisrael* formulation, Succot establishes that there is a G-d, Pesach establishes that G-d is ours ("My son, My firstborn is Israel") and Shavuot affirms that G-d is One ("You shall have no other gods before Me").

⁴⁹ Rashi to Bereishit 3:5, based on *Bereishit Rabbah* 19:4.

⁵⁰ Indeed, this may explain the measure-for-measure nature of their punishment: Adam became a creator in bringing life from the ground, and Chavah became a creator in nourishing life in her womb, but both of them were doomed to experience pain and frustration rather than the ease of Divine creation.

⁵¹ *Bereishit Rabbah* 19:4.

Accepting dependence upon G-d has remained a challenge since the Garden of Eden, as evidenced in the construction of the Tower of Bavel,⁵² and in the examples of monarchs throughout biblical history.⁵³ This is a normal human weakness; our self-respect is naturally tied to our ability to fend for ourselves. So long as we expect to rule our world, humility before any power will be humiliating. Even regarding our Creator we will find humility challenging, such that we may be moved to deny Divine benevolence in order to declare our independence.⁵⁴

This lack of proper perspective on our position in the universe hampers our growth. G-d is not affected by our humility or our arrogance, but an unrealistic view of our place undermines our personal and religious development. The person who ties his self-image to a non-existent self-sufficiency blinds himself to his own flaws and needs, renders himself unable to trust, and cripples his relationship with G-d.

Pesach seeks to correct our blindness by reminding us of the historical events during which we were once dependent. Shavuot offers an opportunity for us to express our gratitude. But Succot, most of all, forces us to confront our reliance upon G-d by moving us into temporary shelter and commanding us to hold out our plants (the four species) before G-d while beseeching, "Please, save us now!" This is the humility which Zechariah demands of the nations in a Messianic time and which the Torah demands of us on an annual basis, and in expressing it we correct that sin of Adam and Chavah.

For seven days, we acknowledge our need for Divine aid. After this, G-d reaches a hand earthward and returns His respect for us with the eighth day of the holiday, Shemini Atzeret. In initiating that last celebration, Hashem says to us, "Your departure is painful for Me."⁵⁵ Acknowledging dependence upon G-d does not take away from our value; if anything, it elevates us, and in this healthy relationship, G-d longs for our presence. May we develop the clarity of vision and confidence of spirit which will empower us to be humble, and so merit to celebrate Shemini Atzeret with our Creator.

⁵² Bereishit 11:4, and *Bereishit Rabbah* 38:6.

⁵³ See *Chullin* 89a, for a partial list of kings who were given power and became arrogant.

⁵⁴ Perhaps it is *especially* challenging regarding our Creator. In Mitzvah 33, the *Sefer haChinuch* presents the mitzvah of honoring one's parents as a stepping stone to feeling gratitude to G-d; we might find it easier to acknowledge our parents because our dependence upon them is not as total as our dependence upon G-d.

⁵⁵ Rashi to Vayikra 23:36.