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October 2017 • Sukkot 5778



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The Minhag of Women Saying *Shehechyanu* When Lighting *Neros Yom Tov*

Several passages in the Gemara cite an obligation to say the beracha of *Shehechyanu* at the commencement of each yom tov. The halacha obligates saying *Shehechyanu* in conjunction with Pesach, Shavuot, both days of Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkos, and Shemini Atzeres. In *Chutz La'aretz* (the Diaspora), where *yom tov sheini shel galuyos* is observed, *Shehechyanu* is said again on the second day of Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres (what we call Simchas Torah).

In general, we find that many berachos associated with mitzvos are said over a *kos shel beracha*, a cup (usually of wine), which is linked with the mitzva; examples include kiddush, havdala, birchas hamazon, bris mila, and the berachos said under a chuppa at a wedding. The *Levush* (*Orach Hayim* 182:1, cited by *Mishna Berura* 182:1) states that this is based upon the understanding that the *kos shel beracha* gives added honor and prestige to the mitzva, as alluded to in the language of the verse *kos yeshuos esah u'veshaim Hashem ekra* (Tehillim 116:13) — “I will lift up the cup of salvation and call out in the name of God.” Several sources in the Gemara indicate clearly that the *Shehechyanu* over the yom tov should also be said over a *kos shel beracha*:

First, in two places (*Eruvin* 40b, *Sukka* 47b), the Gemara considers the



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possibility that one is precluded from saying *Shehechyanu* without a *kos shel beracha*, but concludes that while the *kos shel beracha* is preferred, when it is not available the *Shehechyanu* can be said on its own — *afilu be'shuk* — even in the marketplace.¹

Second, the Gemara in *Pesachim* (102b-103a), while debating the sequence of the berachos of kiddush when the Seder falls on Saturday night, also makes clear that the *Shehechyanu* is to be said during kiddush.

Third, the importance of saying *Shehechyanu* in conjunction with kiddush is reflected in the Gemara's assertion (*Sukka* 46a) that while the completion of the construction of a sukka necessitates the recitation of *Shehechyanu*, the fulfillment of this obligation is deferred until the kiddush on the first night of Sukkos, and the *Shehechyanu* said then addresses the completion of the sukka and the four species as well. This halacha reinforces the apparent strong preference for saying *Shehechyanu* together with a *kos shel beracha*.²

The Custom of Women: Responses by Rav Yaakov Emden and Others

With this background in mind, we turn to a fascinating *teshuva* of Rav Yaakov Emden (1697-1776, *She'eilas Yaavetz* 1:107). He was asked about the appropriateness of the custom of women to say *Shehechyanu* at the time of lighting yom tov candles, which seems to conflict with the Gemara's stated preference to fulfill the obligation in conjunction with kiddush. Rav Emden wavers, acknowledging on the one hand that the custom seems at odds with the Gemara, but also emphasizing that the obligation of *Shehechyanu* can in fact be fulfilled at any time and mentioning that saying *Shehechyanu* at the earliest opportunity highlights the *kavod* and *simcha* that it is meant to convey. Thus, while this custom disregards the Gemara's preferred context for the beracha's recitation, it does not result in a prohibition per se, and this explains why “*gedolei olam*,” who observed this custom, refrained from voicing their objections. Rav Emden injects a

personal element as well, stating that his own wife took this custom from her parents' home, indicating that her father, a halachic authority in his own right,³ apparently allowed the practice. Ultimately, Rav Emden concludes with a compromise: in a place where this custom has not taken hold, women should be told to refrain from doing so. However, he clearly implies that in locales where women follow this practice, it can be allowed to continue — in accordance with Rav Emden's own approach in regard to his wife.

While Rav Emden's view became the starting point for many of the subsequent deliberations in the poskim, it should be noted that this practice existed in Ashkenazi communities well before Rav Emden, and various early sources related to the custom in different ways. An early rishon, the *Or Zarua* (1180-1250, vol. 2, *Siman* 11) writes briefly that when lighting yom tov candles, *ein tzarich lomar zeman* — “there is no need to say *Shehechyanu*.” In the time of the later rishonim, the *Leket Yosher* (1423-1490) references the custom of some women to say *Shehechyanu* when lighting yom tov candles, and citing the *Or Zarua* as support, voices opposition to the practice.

During the era of the early achronim, several authoritative collections of minhagim relate to the issue. The *Yosef Ometz*, written in 1630, sharply critiques the practice of women saying *Shehechyanu* when lighting yom tov candles, stating that no source supports it, and the *Noheg Ka'tzon Yosef* (written 1718) references the *Yosef Ometz* and confirms the critique. However, the *Minhagei Kehilla Kedosha Vermaizah*, (written 1648), records this practice as the standard custom in the community, and does not remark further. In addition to these *sifrei ha'minhagim*,

we find several references in poskim in regard to this custom. One of the leading early achronim, R. Yair Bachrach⁴ (1638-1702), refers twice to the custom of saying *Shehechyanu* when lighting yom tov candles as the standard practice, without further comment. The *Eliya Rabba* (1660-1712, O.C. 600:3) presents this custom of women in regard to Rosh Hashana without any critique. The author of the *Korban Nesanel* (R. Nesanel Veil, 1687-1769) is quoted by his son⁵ as saying said that women should be allowed to continue their custom, referring to the Gemara that women were allowed to do the act of *semicha* on a *korban* because it brought them *nachas ruach*, a sense of fulfillment.⁶

Most of these aforementioned sources were not part of the halachic discourse that dealt with this issue in the 19th and much of the 20th century. The view of Rav Emden, stating that there is no need to say *Shehechyanu* at the time of *hadlakas neros* but that women should not be prevented from doing so, took center stage, and it was cited repeatedly and given much weight. His position is adopted by many of the classical Ashkenazi halachic works such as the *Mishnah Berura* (263:23)⁷ and the *Aruch Hashulchan* (263:12).⁸ Among Sephardim there was a greater prevalence of poskim who rejected the custom, and this is reflected in the ruling of Rav Ovadia Yosef on the matter.⁹

Interestingly, after the time of Rav Yaakov Emden, there was relatively little discussion about secondary halachic issues that could result from saying *Shehechyanu* when lighting yom tov candles. In more recent times, halachic authorities raised new questions regarding this practice, and this has given the essential issue added layers of complexity. Several of these topics are presented below.

Issue #1: Hefsek when Answering Amen in Kiddush

The halacha prohibits creating a *hefsek*, an interruption, between a beracha and the act or mitzvah that it relates to. This gives rise to the following question: if a woman already fulfilled her obligation of *Shehechyanu* by reciting it at the time of lighting candles, how is she permitted to answer *amen* when this beracha is said at the end of kiddush? If she does not need this beracha, is it not akin to inserting extraneous words that constitute a *hefsek* between the kiddush and the drinking of the wine? There are three opinions in the poskim:

First, Rav Moshe Feinstein¹⁰ argues that it is permissible for a woman to answer *amen* in these circumstances. Rav Moshe begins his *teshuva* by contending that were there an issue of *hefsek*, it is inconceivable that the halachic authorities would have remained silent as multitudes of women transgressed a prohibition each yom tov. Then, in addressing the rationale, Rav Moshe presents the thesis that the person who says the text of a beracha to exempt others is considered the leader, and others who fulfill their obligation through him are considered *tafel* (secondary), and defer to his text. Thus, the text of the person reciting kiddush becomes the default text for all those who fulfill their mitzvah of kiddush through him. To prove his view, Rav Moshe notes that general Sephardi practice, following the *Shulchan Aruch*, prohibits women from saying the beracha of *leishev ba'sukka* (and all other *berachos* on *mitzvos aseï she'hazman gerama*). If so, reasons Rav Moshe, why is a Sephardi woman allowed to answer

amen to this beracha when it is said in the context of kiddush — should it not constitute a *hefsek*, as a Sephardi woman is prohibited from (ever) saying this beracha and it is therefore unnecessary from her point of view? The silence of the poskim indicates that this is not a problem, proving, says Rav Moshe, that since *leishev ba'sukka* is the text for the person saying kiddush, it becomes the text for everyone fulfilling their mitzva of kiddush through this individual.¹¹

Second, some authorities¹² rule that any woman who says *Shehechyanu* when lighting candles should not answer *amen* to *Shehechyanu* in kiddush due to the issue of *hefsek*.

Third, a number of contemporary poskim,¹³ while accepting the basic view that answering *amen* to *Shehechyanu* in kiddush may constitute a *hefsek* if the individual does not need this beracha presently, argue that a distinction should be made between various *yomim tovim*. On Pesach and Sukkos, the *Shehechyanu* in kiddush has two functions: it relates to the yom tov itself, and it also fulfills the requirement for a *Shehechyanu* for the unique mitzvos of the yom tov that will be initially fulfilled that evening (sitting in the sukka on Sukkos, and the many mitzvos that are fulfilled *Leil ha'Seder* on Pesach). Thus, one may suggest that the *Shehechyanu* said by a woman at the time of lighting candles only relates to the yom tov. She relies upon the *Shehechyanu* in kiddush to cover the mitzvos that are to be fulfilled during or immediately after the kiddush, and therefore she can and must answer *amen*. On Shavuos and Rosh Hashana, however, when there are no special mitzvos relating to the yom tov that

require a *Shehechyanu*, a woman who already said *Shehechyanu* when lighting candles would be precluded from answering *amen* because of the concern of *hefsek*. As proof for this view, some of these poskim¹⁴ cite the *Alfasi Zuta* (R. Menahem Azariah mi'Pano, 1548-1620, end of third perek of *Rosh Hashana*), who proposes that if someone said kiddush solely to exempt someone else on the night of Shavuos, he would not repeat the *Shehechyanu* a second time when saying his own kiddush, as he already fulfilled his obligation the first time. However, if this kiddush took place on the night of Pesach or Sukkos, then he could say a *Shehechyanu* a second time, because the first *Shehechyanu* relates to the yom tov, while the second *Shehechyanu* is associated with the mitzvos of sukka or matza.¹⁵

It should be noted that while the *Alfasi Zuta* actually allows an individual to say *Shehechyanu* twice on Pesach and Sukkos and this is cited by some poskim to justify a woman answering *amen* in kiddush, the question arises to whether it follows that a woman could actually say *Shehechyanu* twice on Pesach and Sukkos: once at candle lighting and once if she says her own kiddush. Some suggest that such action might be justified following this approach.¹⁶ However, a strong case can be made that the gravity of saying an unnecessary beracha is more severe than the issue of *hefsek*, and therefore the justification may not be compelling enough to allow two recitations of *Shehechyanu*. This concern is elevated by the fact that numerous poskim state explicitly that a woman who says *Shehechyanu* when lighting candles must make sure not to say *Shehechyanu* if she says kiddush on *Leil ha'Seder*.¹⁷

Issue #2 - Is the *Shehechyanu* a *Hefsek* between the Beracha and the Lighting?

The custom of Ashkenazi women (and some Sephardi women) regarding Shabbos is to first light the candles, cover one's eyes, and then say the beracha prior to uncovering one's eyes and benefiting from the light (*Rama* 263:5). Whereas there is a principle of saying a beracha over *li'asiyasan* — immediately before the mitzva is fulfilled — this procedure is based upon the premise that acceptance of Shabbos is effected by the recitation of the beracha over the candles, which then would prohibit the person from lighting the candles. There is a dispute among the acharonim regarding the proper procedure for lighting yom tov candles. The son of R. Yaakov Falk, the author of the *Derisha* on the *Tur*, writes that his mother pointed out that since one is allowed to light a flame from an existing fire on yom tov, the impetus for delaying the beracha until after lighting the candles does not apply on yom tov, for even if the beracha does effect acceptance of yom tov, it would still be permitted to light the yom tov candles. Thus, she counselled that one should maintain the more conventional sequence of saying the beracha prior to lighting yom tov candles. The *Magen Avraham* disagreed, asserting that it is important to maintain a consistent manner of lighting Shabbos and yom tov candles, and therefore the Shabbos procedure should be followed on yom tov as well. Many later authorities ruled in favor of the view of the *Derisha's* wife.¹⁸

The position that necessitates saying the beracha prior to the lighting of the candles results in a potential problem for the women who say *Shehechyanu* at this time. If the beracha over the

candles and the *Shehechyanu* were said after the lighting of the candles, as the *Magen Avraham* advocates, then there would be no problem of *hefsek*. However, if these two berachos are said prior to the lighting of the candles, then the *Shehechyanu* could constitute a *hefsek* between the beracha over the candles and the lighting of the candles. While *Shehechyanu* is routinely said between a *birchas ha'mitzva* and the fulfillment of that mitzva when fulfilling various mitzvos for the first time during a yom tov (e.g. lulav, shofar, *neros Chanuka*), it is not considered a *hefsek* in that context because it relates directly to the mitzva. However, if the *Shehechyanu* under discussion relates to the yom tov itself and not to the mitzva of lighting yom tov candles, the insertion of this beracha prior to the lighting may arguably be considered a *hefsek*.

Some poskim advise that a woman should make sure to say *Shehechyanu* after lighting the candles to avoid this issue.¹⁹ Others assert that since the *Shehechyanu* relates to yom tov, it is broadly relevant to *hadlakas neros*, which is for the sake of *kavod yom tov*, and therefore does not constitute a *hefsek*.²⁰

Issue #3 – Can a Woman Stipulate to Defer the Acceptance of Yom Tov?

The lighting of *neros Shabbos* is generally assumed to signify the acceptance of Shabbos. However, in extenuating circumstances a woman can make a *tenai*, a stipulation, that the *neros Shabbos* do not usher in Shabbos and she can accept Shabbos at a later time.²¹ In principle, these rules should apply in regard to *neros yom tov* as well. However, many poskim point out that if a woman says *Shehechyanu* when

lighting *neros Yom Tov*, she may not be able to defer the acceptance of yom tov. This is evident from the Gemara in *Eruvin* (40b) which asserts that it is not possible to say *Shehechyanu* on Yom Kippur over a *kos shel beracha* because saying *Shehechyanu* brings about the acceptance of Yom Kippur, which in turn makes drinking the *kos* impossible. The Gemara compares saying *Shehechyanu* before Yom Kippur to someone who davens Maariv of Shabbos late Friday afternoon, which causes the acceptance of Shabbos.

This can have great practical significance on any given yom tov. A woman who needs to do something prohibited on yom tov after candle lighting should stipulate that she is not accepting yom tov and must also skip the *Shehechyanu*; otherwise, the restrictions of yom tov apply despite her stipulation to the contrary.²²

A Different Perspective on the Shehechyanu

A few later authorities²³ have proposed a different understanding of the custom of saying *Shehechyanu* when lighting *neros yom tov* that would resolve all of the questions raised thus far. They suggest that this *Shehechyanu* does not relate to the yom tov itself, but rather to the mitzva of *neros yom tov*. In their view, just as a *Shehechyanu* is recited on yomim tovim for the unique mitzvos related to the respective yom tov (lulav, shofar, *kerias ha'megilla*, *neros Chanuka*, etc.), so too *Shehechyanu* is said over the reintroduced mitzvah of *neros yom tov*. According to this perspective, there would be no issue regarding answering *amen* to *Shehechyanu* in kiddush, for the *Shehechyanu* in kiddush which relates to the yom tov is still fully required

even after *Shehechyanu* is said over *neros yom tov*. In fact, according to this view, a woman who lights candles and says her own kiddush would say *Shehechyanu* each time. Furthermore, the *Shehechyanu* would not constitute a *hefsek* between the beracha and the lighting, since the *Shehechyanu* relates to the mitzva itself and is no different than *Shehechyanu* over shofar, lulav, etc. Finally, the *Shehechyanu* said during *neros yom tov* would not preclude a woman from stipulating that she is not accepting yom tov, as this consequence only applies to the *Shehechyanu* said over the yom tov itself.

Given that this approach resolves all the above issues, why did the poskim who discussed these questions *not* present this view or even suggest it as a possibility? Apparently, they took for granted that the mitzva of *neros yom tov*, which is fulfilled every yom tov, does not bear the novelty of the other mitzvos that are unique to each particular yom tov, and in fact *neros Yom Tov* is strikingly similar to *neros Shabbos*. In addition, even if one would argue that the *Shehechyanu* relates to the candle lighting, it is logical to assume that since the *Shehechyanu* (when said prior to sunset) signifies the acceptance of the yom tov, it should also fulfill the obligation of *Shehechyanu* over the yom tov itself.²⁴ Therefore, it was assumed by the poskim that no *Shehechyanu* was required for the mitzva of *neros Yom Tov*, and the *Shehechyanu* said at the time of candle lighting relates to the yom tov itself.

Conclusion

In closing, we may seek to draw a lesson from the centuries-old practice of women to say *Shehechyanu* when lighting *neros yom tov*. Why did they

find it so important to say the beracha at that specific time; what was so compelling? As Rav Emden alludes to, women apparently sought to express their joy at the arrival of yom tov at the earliest opportunity. As yom tov was ushered in through the candle lighting, the mundane and material elements of life receded and the kedusha of yom tov commenced its reign, transforming life and time itself and propelling the Jew to a higher plane of existence. How could one not seize this opportunity to give voice to this delight by saying the Shehechyanu that Chazal mandated for each yom tov? Perhaps this can serve as a model for the attitude that we must adopt in approaching mitzvos in general. In today's wired and connected world, we often find it difficult to disconnect and immerse ourselves in the activities and experiences that are most meaningful. Too often, we engage in tefilla or enter Shabbos still distracted by the unending stream of information and communication that we are exposed to throughout the day. The eagerness and excitement of women saying *Shehechyanu* at the very onset of Yom Tov can help us to reframe our thinking and enthusiastically anticipate the opportunities to connect deeply and completely with the mitzvos that elevate and enrich us.

Endnotes

1 Some of the rishonim state that saying *Shehechyanu* over a *kos shel berachah* is a “*mitzva min ha'muwhar*” — a preferred practice (Ran, *Eruvin* 40b, s.v. *Mai havei*; Or *Zaruah*, *Hilchos Eruvin Siman* 140). The *Tur* (O.C. *Siman* 519) writes that while one can fulfill the obligation of *Shehechyanu* in any context, *tiknu le'omro al ha'kos*, “they instituted that it should be said over a *kos*,” and the Rambam also writes (*Sukka* 6:12) *u'mesader kol ha'berachos al ha'kos*, “one incorporates all the berachos (including *Shehechyanu*) together with the *kos* [of kiddush].”

It is interesting to note that in the commentary of Ri ben Chakmon on *Eruvin* (s.v. *Ve'hilkhatah*), he writes that it is completely permissible to say *Shehechyanu* prior to kiddush, but if the individual has not yet said *Shehechyanu* at the time of kiddush it is preferable to say *Shehechyanu* over the *kos* of kiddush. This would justify saying *Shehechyanu* before kiddush, but it is not the mainstream view in the rishonim.

2 See *Shulchan Aruch* O.C. 641:1. The *Minchas Chinuch* (*Mitzva* 300) initially suggests that according to the Gemara's conclusion that the *Shehechyanu* over the completion of the *sukka* and *daled minim* should be deferred in order to say it over a *kos shel beracha*, it should follow that one who forgot *Shehechyanu* at the beginning of Pesach should wait until kiddush on the evening of the seventh day of Pesach in order to say the *Shehechyanu* over a *kos shel beracha*. The *Minchas Chinuch* counters that one might distinguish between the two situations: in the case of the Gemara, *Shehechyanu* is going to be said in any case in the kiddush at the beginning of yom tov, in contrast to the scenario he presented. In any case, his discussion confirms the importance of saying *Shehechyanu* with a *kos shel beracha* when possible.

The *Nesiv Chaim* (on *Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 432) asserts that the *mitzvah* of *shechitas korban Pesach* also requires a *Shehechyanu*, but it is fulfilled through the *Shehechyanu* said at kiddush, similar to the *Shehechyanu* for *sukka* and *lulav*. The *Teshuvos Shevet Halevi* (3:69) disputes this, arguing that *shechitas korban Pesach* does not require a *Shehechyanu* at all.

3 The *Elef La'Mateh* (619:6) identifies R. Emden's father-in-law as R. Mordechai Katz, the *Av Bais Din* of Poznin.

4 *Mekor Chaim* (printed in the *Machon Yerushalayim Shulchan Aruch*) 529:2, 610:2.

5 His son, R. Tia Veil, cites this in his commentary to the *Haggada* “*Marbeh Li'saper*” (in a note regarding kiddush), which is turn is quoted in *Teshuva Me'ahava* (R. Eleazar Fleckeles, 1754-1826, a student of the *Noda Bi'yehuda* and the Chief Rabbi of Prague, v. 2 *Siman* 239, s.v. *Hinei*). The *Teshuva Me'ahava* says that he was always puzzled by this custom, and concludes by stating that it causes a stumbling block because women who say kiddush at *Leil ha'Seder* end up saying *Shehechyanu* twice, which in his view certainly constitutes a *beracha li'vatala*. This point was made by R. Tia Veil as well, and he says that his father agreed with him.

6 See *Chagigah* 16b, *Rosh Hashana* 33a. Interestingly, many of the authorities mentioned here either lived in Germany or strongly identified with its scholars, indicating both that the custom under discussion was prevalent there and also that there was not a clear consensus among the rabbonim regarding its legitimacy.

While he lived several generations after the sources cited here, it should be noted that the *Mateh Ephraim* (1762-1828; 581:54, 599:9, 619:4) also cites this custom as the standard practice without any critique or comment.

7 It should be noted that the *Mishna Berura* in *Hilchos Rosh Hashana* (600:4) mentions the custom of women saying *Shehechyanu* when lighting yom tov candles without critiquing it. That passage in the *Mishna Berura* is apparently quoting from the *Eliya Rabba* cited above.

8 R. Emden's position is a nuanced one, and it is not surprising that different later authorities quote him with subtle but important distinctions. For example, Rabbi Akiva Eiger, the *Shaarei Teshuva*, and others cite R. Emden as saying that *ve'ain la'zeh yesod, mihu ain limchos bahen bi'chezkas yad* — “this has no foundation, but one should not protest against them aggressively.” The *Mishna Berura* uses a much milder formulation: *ve'ain tzarich le'varech zeman al ha'hadlaka, mihu bi'makom she'nahagu ain limhos bi'yadan* — “there is no need to say *Shehechyanu* when lighting candles, but one should not protest in a place where there is such a custom.” The *Aruch ha'Shulchan* has a similar presentation to the *Mishna Berura*.

We also find views among later poskim that are more unequivocally supportive or opposed: The *Tzitz Eliezer* (14:53) argues that the persistence and prevalence of the custom indicates that most authorities were supportive of it, and he advocates for encouraging women to continue the practice. The *Moadim U'zmanim* (7:117) quotes that the Brisker Rav, R. Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveitchik, was opposed to this custom.

9 See *Yechaveh Daas*, 3:34, *Yalkut Yosef*, *Moadim: Sukka*, pp. 590-601. While R. Yosef does not prohibit the practice outright, he strongly discourages it. R. Ben-Tzion Abba Shaul (*Or Li'tzion*, v. 3, Ch. 18 #2), has a more accommodating presentation that is more similar to the view of R. Emden, stating that women who have this practice are allowed to continue to observe it. See, however, *Teshuvos Tzitz Eliezer* 14:53, par. 3, who quotes the *Ben Ish Chai* (*Shana 1: Bamidar*, par. 1; *Shana 2:*

Noach, par. 10) and other Sephardi poskim who give legitimacy to the minhag and indicate that a significant number of Sephardi communities followed it.

10 *Igros Moshe* O.C. v. 4, 21(9), 101(1).

11 Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (*Minchas Shlomo, Tanina, Siman* 60 #24; *Halichos Shlomo, Moadim: Nisan-Av*, Ch. 9 par. 22), concisely marshals many of the same essential arguments as Rav Feinstein. However, he was only lenient on Pesach and Sukkos (see *Halichos Shlomo, Moadim: Tishrei-Adar*, Ch. 9 par. 5), as the *Shehechyanu* at kiddush could relate to the special mitzvos of the yom tov (sukka, matza, etc), while on Rosh Hashana and Shavuot he instructed the women to refrain from answering *amen* to the *Shehechyanu* in kiddush. In other words, while he largely subscribed to Rav Feinstein's view, in practice he followed the third view (mentioned below) in regard to this issue. See also *Shemiras Shabbos Ki'hilchisa* (48:7).

Rav B.Z. Abba Shaul (*Or Li'tzion*, *ibid.*) also gives a similar explanation for why answering *amen* to *Shehechyanu* is not a *hefsek* and cites the example of Sephardi women answering *amen* to *lei'shev ba'sukka* as proof.

Rav Ovadia Yosef is aligned with the third view in regard to this issue, and therefore allows a woman who has already said *Shehechyanu* to answer *amen* only on Pesach (see below). Following this reasoning, he actually rules that a Sephardi woman should not answer *amen* to the beracha of *leishev ba'sukka* in kiddush, but should rather just think of the *amen* (*Yabia Omer*, 9:60; *Chazon Ovadia: Sukkos*, p. 149). It is striking that Rav Yosef does not cite any previous poskim who take this position, which reinforces the argument of Rav Feinstein and Rav Abba Shaul.

There are numerous other circumstances discussed by the poskim in which an individual being *yotzei* from someone else faces the dilemma of whether to answer *amen* to a beracha the listener may not need. Some examples include:

1) Can a Sephardi, who follows the view of the *Shulchan Aruch* that a *Shehechyanu* is only said over the night reading of the megilla on Purim, answer *amen* to the *Shehechyanu* said by an Ashkenazi over the megilla on Purim morning?

2) According to the poskim who question whether a woman is obligated in the beracha of *Borei Me'orei Ha'aish* on *Motzei Shabbos*, should a woman refrain from answering *amen* to this beracha in Havdala?

3) If someone listening to Havdala will not have the chance to smell the *besamim* after the beracha is said, should the individual answer *amen*?

12 See *She'elos U'Teshuvos Har Tzvi* (O.C. 54); Rav Elyashiv (*Ashrei Ha'ish, Hilchos Yom Tov*, 2:10, and *Hilchos Shabbos* 7:21); see Rav S.Z. Auerbach, cited below.

13 See *Teshuvos Shevet Halevi* 3:69, *Shemiras Shabbos Ki'hilchisa* 44:4. For questions on this approach, see *Mikra'ei Kodesh* (R. Tzvi Pesach Frank), *Pesach* v. 2, #38; *Minchas Shlomo* and *Halichos Shlomo* (*ibid.*).

14 See *Yechaveh Daas* 3:34.

15 It should be emphasized that even according to this view, an individual is unquestionably prohibited from saying *Shehechyanu* twice on Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, and Shavuot.

While we have grouped Sukkos together with Pesach, there are in fact significant distinctions between the two as they relate to our discussion. While it may be plausible that a woman is obligated to say *Shehechyanu* over matza and the other mitzvos of the Seder, as she is obligated in them, saying a *Shehechyanu* in the middle of kiddush specifically over the mitzva of sukka is more problematic, as a woman is not obligated in this mitzva. Nonetheless, for Ashkenazi women who are permitted to say a beracha over the mitzva of sukka, one may argue that a woman may say *Shehechyanu* over the mitzva as well (see e.g. *Halichos Shlomo, Moadim: Tishrei-Adar*, Ch. 9 par. 5). However, Sephardi women who generally do not say berachos on mitzvos *asei she'hazman gerama* should not say a *Shehechyanu* over such a mitzva (see *Yechaveh Daas, ibid.*).

Some authorities raise another conceptual and practical issue: While it is permitted to light *neros yom tov* after yom tov has begun, there is a prominent view that advises that the candles should be lit during the day prior to the onset of yom tov, similar to the time-frame for *neros Shabbos*, and this is the practice of many women. One might argue that the *Shehechyanu* said at this time cannot cover the mitzvos relating to Pesach and Sukkos, as it is not yet possible to fulfill those mitzvos! The essential question revolves around whether a *Shehechyanu* can sometimes be said prior to the arrival of a mitzva or event if it is being said in conjunction with an associated matter. The most important primary source in this discussion is the view of Tosafos (*Sukka*

46a, s.v. *Nichnas*) and other rishonim, which states that if a person said *Shehechyanu* after completing the construction of the sukka before yom tov, this beracha would also cover the *Shehechyanu* over the yom tov itself. (See also *Biur Halacha* 641:1 s.v. *ela.*) For discussion of this as it relates to our topic, see *Tzitz Eliezer* (10:19); *Minchas Shlomo* and *Halichos Shlomo* (*ibid.*), *Teshuvos Li'horos Noson* (v. 4, #21-22); *Yalkut Yosef, Moadim: Sukka*, pp. 600-601; *Nitei Gavriel, Erev Pesach She'chal Bi'Shabbos, She'eilos U'teshuvos* #1-2.

16 The *Shevet Halevi* (*ibid.*) initially wrote that this reasoning could not be applied to allow two recitations of *Shehechyanu*, but in a note added later in the margin, he writes that apparently some women do say *Shehechyanu* twice and this logic could offer some justification for their practice.

17 The *Teshuva Me'avahav* writes explicitly that this would constitute a *beracha li'vatala*, and the *Korban Nesanel* and his son (mentioned above) concur. Rav Y.M. Tukachinsky (*Luach Li'Eretz Yisrael*) also warns that women who say *Shehechyanu* when lighting candles should not say it during kiddush of the Seder, and the *Kaf HaChaim* (514:112) says the same regarding all *yomim tovim*. See also *Halichos Shlomo* (*ibid.*, n. 152).

18 See *Mishna Berura* 263:27.

19 *Moadim U'zmanim* 7:117; *Chazon Ovadia: Haggada shel Pesach*, p. 132, *Yechaveh Daas* 3:34.

20 See *Or Li'tzion, ibid.*, *Shemiras Shabbos Ki'hilchasa* Ch. 44 fn. 14.

The *Halichos Shlomo* (*ibid.*, n. 149) seems to state that the *Shehechyanu* relates to the *hadlakas neros* in addition to the yom tov itself. This seems similar to the view which will be mentioned at the end of the article, but it is difficult in particular because R. Auerbach himself wrote that the proposition that *Shehechyanu* relates to *hadlakas neros yom tov* is very difficult.

21 See *Shulchan Aruch* 263:10.

22 *Teshuvos Pri Yitzchak* 2:9. See *Kaf HaChaim* (514:112), *Nefesh HaRav* (p. 210), *Or Li'tzion* (*ibid.*), *Shemiras Shabbos Ki'hilchisa* (43:23).

23 *Teshuvos Zecher Simcha* #34, cited and discussed in *Teshuvos Tzitz Eliezer* 10:19; *Emes Li'Yaakov* on the *Shulchan Aruch, Siman* 585.

24 See R. S.Z. Auerbach, *Minchas Shlomo* and *Halichos Shlomo* (*ibid.*).

The Sukkah in *Olam Hazeah* and *Olam Habah*

Of all the mitzvot in the Torah, very few involve fulfilling the mitzvah with our entire body.

For example, we hear the shofar on Rosh Hashanah with our ears, we eat matzah on Pesach with our mouths, and we learn Torah on Shavout with our minds and hopefully hearts. But on Sukkot, we fulfill the mitzvah with our entire body as we surround ourselves with the sukkah. What is it about Sukkot that requires us to be surrounded by the mitzvah?

The *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law), *Orach Chaim* 639:1, gives us the following directive:

כיצד מצות ישיבה בסוכה שיהיה אוכל ושותה (וישן ומטייל) ודר בסוכה כל שבעת הימים בין ביום ובין בלילה כדרך שהוא דר בביתו בשאר ימות השנה וכל שבעת ימים עושה אדם את ביתו עראי ואת סוכתו קבע.

The proper fulfillment of the commandment of the sukkah is to eat and drink, sleep and rest, and live in it all seven days, both day and night just like one lives in his home during the rest of the year. For these seven days a person makes his home the temporary dwelling and the sukkah his principal dwelling.

The Torah tells us in Vayikra 23:42-3:

בַּסֻּכּוֹת תֵּשְׁבוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כָּל הָאֶזְרָח בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשְׁבוּ בַּסֻּכּוֹת. לְמַעַן יֵדְעוּ דֹרֹתֵיכֶם כִּי בַּסֻּכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

For seven days you should live in booths. Every native in Israel should live in such thatched huts. This is so that future generations will know that I caused the



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Children of Israel to dwell in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

The Gemarah, *Sukkah* 11b, explains what these booths are meant to represent:

תניא כי בסוכות הושבתי את בני ישראל ענני כבוד היו דברי ר' אליעזר ר"ע אומר סוכות ממש עשו להם

It was taught, "That I settled the Jews in booths." Rabbi Eliezer said that this refers to the clouds of glory. Rabbi Akiva said the Jews made actual booths for themselves.

What is the real difference between these two opinions? Why is it so important to know whether the sukkah represented the clouds of glory that protected the Jewish people as we travelled through the desert, or the actual booths the Jewish people constructed and lived in for those formative years that the Jewish people lived in the desert?

The difference comes down to what aspect of those forty years we are meant to focus on when we sit in the sukkah: the miraculous or the mundane. Let's examine this a little closer.

They Lived in Booths – So Should You!

Rabbeinu Bachya (Vayikra 23:43) explains that living in actual booths commemorates the miraculous nature of our ancestors' survival in the desert:

דעת האומר סכות ממש עשו להם, מפני זה נצטוינו לעשות סכות דוגמתן, כדי שיתגלה ויתפרסם מתוך מצות הסכות גודל מעלתן של ישראל במדבר שהיו הולכים עם כובד האנשים והנשים והטף במקום ההוא אשר אין בטבע האדם לחיות בו ... כי שם באותו מקום הכנתי להם כל צרכם ולא חסרו דבר.

According to the opinion that says that the Jews made actual booths for themselves, we are commanded to make booths like those, to publicize the greatly elevated state of existence that the Jews enjoyed in the desert. They traveled in the desert with masses of men, women, and children in a place where it is not the nature of man to live ... Even in that place, God prepared for them all of their needs and they lacked nothing.

This understanding sits well with how the Torah (Bereishit 33:17) uses the word sukkah in a different context. Yaakov was traveling with the many animals he had acquired and he needed to protect them from the elements:

וַיַּעֲקֹב נֶסֶע סֻכָּתָהּ וַיִּבְנוּ לֹוּ בַיִת וַלְמִקְנָהּ עֹשֶׂה סֻכָּת עַל כֵּן קָרָא שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם סֻכּוֹת.
Yaakov went to Sukkot. There, he built himself a house, and made shelters (sukkot) for his livestock. He therefore named the place Sukkot.

The Rashbam (Vayikra 23:43) explains that dwelling in booths heightens our sense of appreciation for God's blessing of abundance. At this time of year, the summer has come to an end and the produce of the field has now ripened and been threshed. Our storehouses and actual houses are now filled with our year's work. The Torah clearly warns us of the potential problem that may come with feeling so excited about our newfound wealth and success:

בְּאוֹסֵפְךָ אֶת תְּבוּאת הָאָרֶץ וּבְתִיכֶם מְלֵאִים כֹּל טוֹב דָּגָן וּתְרוּשׁ וַיִּצְהַר, לִמְעַן תִּזְכְּרוּ כִּי בְּסוּכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִדְבַר אַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה בְּלֹא יִישׁוּב וּבְלֹא נַחֲלָה, וּמִתּוֹךְ כֵּךְ תִּתְּנוּ הוֹדָאָה לְמִי שֵׁנַתְּנוּ לָכֶם נַחֲלָה וּבְתִיכֶם מְלֵאִים כֹּל טוֹב, וְאֵל תֹּאמְרוּ בְּלִבְבְּכֶם כַּחַי וְעוֹצֵם יָדִי עֹשֶׂה לִּי אֶת הַחֵיִל הַזֶּה.

When you have gathered in the produce of the land and your houses become filled with all manner of goodness such as grain, wine, and oil, remember that "I settled the people of Israel in sukkot when I took them out of the land of Egypt" (Vayikra 23:43). For forty years you dwelt in the wilderness, unsettled and without land. Therefore, it is most fitting that you should be grateful to God for having given you an inheritance and houses full of all manner of good. Do not imagine in your hearts that "my own strength and power have wrought all of this wealth for me" (Devarim 8:17).

By leaving our homes and moving into a flimsy roofed hut at the height of our financial success, the Torah is enabling us to realize where our success truly comes from. The same G-d that redeemed us from Egypt is the One

who keeps us successful in our land by bringing us financial blessings. This realization is most needed when our bank accounts are full, at the tail end of the agricultural season. When do you truly appreciate what you have? When it gets taken away. Even if that lasts for only seven days.

What about the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer? What is his understanding of the purpose of sitting in a sukkah to commemorate the Clouds of Glory?

To understand this, let's see what the role the Clouds of Glory played for the Jewish people at that time.

It's all about the Clouds

The Torah (Shemot 13:21) tells us:

וְהָיָה הַלֵּיל לְפָנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם בְּעַמּוּד עָנָן לְנַחֲתָם הַדֶּרֶךְ וּלְיָלֵה בְּעַמּוּד אֵשׁ לְהָאִיר לָהֶם לְלַכֵּת יוֹמָם וּלְיָלֵה.

God went before them by day with a pillar of cloud, to guide them along the way. By night it appeared as a pillar of fire, providing them with light. They could thus travel day and night.

The Sifri (Beha'alotecha 83) explains:

שִׁבְעָה עֲנָנִים הָיוּ, אַרְבַּעָה מֵאַרְבַּע רֹחוֹתָם וְאַחַד מִלְּמַעְלָה וְאַחַד מִלְּמַטָּה וְאַחַד מִלְּפָנֵיהֶם הַגְּבוּהָ מִנְּמִיכּוֹ וְהַנְּמוּךְ מִגְּבִיּהוּ וּמִכַּח אֵת הַנַּחֲשִׁים וְאֵת הָעֲקָרְבִים וּמִכְבֵּד וּמִרְבֵּץ לְפָנֵיהֶם *Seven clouds are recorded in the account of their travels: four from the four sides, one above, one below, and one in front of them which would flatten the high land, raise the holes in the ground and destroy snakes and scorpions.*

The clouds therefore had a number of different functions: they guided the Jewish people during their journey through the desert, giving them protection by night and by day, and they made their travels easier (by making the land flat) and less

dangerous (by removing snakes and scorpions in their way).

The *Sefer Hachinuch* (Mitzvah 325) tells us that by dwelling in a sukkah, we were reminded of the miracles God performed for us and inspires us to be careful in performing mitzvot:

מִשְׂרָשֵׁי הַמִּצְוָה, מֵה שֶׁמְּפֹרֵשׁ בְּכַתּוּב לְמַעַן נִזְכּוֹר הַנִּסִּים הַגְּדוּלִים שֶׁעָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים לְבָרוּךְ הוּא לְאַבּוֹתֵינוּ בְּמִדְבַר בְּצֵאתָם מִמִּצְרַיִם, שְׂסִיכֶם בְּעֲנֵי כְבוֹד שֶׁלֹא יִזְיַק לָהֶם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בַּיּוֹם וְקָרַח בַּלַּיְלָה. וַיֵּשׁ שְׂפִירוֹ שֶׁסּוּכּוֹת מִמֶּשׁ עָשׂוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִדְבַר. וּמִתּוֹךְ זִכְרָת נִפְלְאוֹתָיו שֶׁעָשָׂה עִמָּנוּ וְעַם אֲבוֹתֵינוּ נִזְהָר בְּמִצְוֹתָיו בְּרוּךְ הוּא, וְנִהְיָ רְאוּיִים לְקַבֵּלֵת הַטּוֹבָה מֵאַתָּה, וְזֶהוּ חִפְצוֹ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שֶׁחָפֵץ לְהִיטִיב.

The root of this mitzvah is to remind us of the great miracles that God did for our forefathers in the desert after they departed from Egypt. God surrounded them with Clouds of Glory in order that the sun should not bother the Jews by day nor the cold by night. Some commentators write that they actually built sukkot in the desert. Remembering the wonders that God performed for us and for our ancestors will inspire us to be careful with His commandments and will lead us to merit receiving good from Him, which is what He desires.

The Vilna Gaon (*Shir HaShirim* 1:4) explains that the Clouds of Glory had another function: they represented the return of the Divine Presence to the Jewish nation. As he explains:

לְפִי שֶׁכִּשְׁעָשׂוּ אֶת הָעֵגֶל נִסְתַּלְקוּ הָעֲנָנִים וְאִזּוֹ לֹא חָזְרוּ עַד שֶׁהִתְחִילוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת הַמִּשְׁכָּן וּמִשָּׁה יָרַד בַּיּוֹם הַכִּיפּוּרִים וּבְמַחֲרַת יוֹם הַכִּיפּוּרִים "וַיִּקְהַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" וְצִוִּיהוּ עַל מְלֹאכֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן, זֶה הָיָה בִּי"א תְּשֵׁרֵי וְכַתִּיב "וְהָעַם הֵבִיאוּ [עוֹד נִדְבָה] בְּבוֹקֵר בְּבוֹקֵר" עוֹד שְׁנֵי יָמִים, הָרִי ל"ג בְּתִשְׂרִי, וּבִי"ד בְּתִשְׂרִי נִטְלוּ כֹל חֶכֶם לֵב מִמֹּשֶׁה אֶת הַזֹּהָב בְּמִנִּין וּבְמִשְׁקָל וּבִט"ו הִתְחִילוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת, וְאִזּוֹ חָזְרוּ עֲנֵי כְבוֹד וְלִכְךָ אֲנִי עוֹשִׂין סוּכּוֹת בִּט"ו.

When the Jews made the Golden Calf

(in Tammuz), the Clouds of Glory disappeared, only to return when the Jews began to build the Mishkan. Moshe descended from Har Sinai with the second Tablets on Yom Kippur. The following day, the eleventh day of Tishrei, Moshe gathered the nation and commanded them to build the Mishkan. Then, as the Torah writes, the next two days, the twelfth and thirteenth of Tishrei, the Jews contributed materials and precious metals to build the Mishkan. On the fourteenth of Tishrei the Sages who were designated to construct the Mishkan and its vessels took the gold from Moshe. And on the fifteenth of Tishrei the Jews began to build the Mishkan and the Clouds of Glory returned. This is why we celebrate Sukkot on the fifteenth of Tishrei.

According to the Vilna Gaon, the clouds not only offered protection,

they also acted as a sign. After the sin of the Golden Calf, Hashem removed the clouds from over the Jewish people, but after the Mishkan was built, the clouds returned and remained with them until their entry into Israel. The sukkah, and thereby the clouds it comes to represent, are a sign of G-d's continued love for the Jewish people even after the tragic sin of the Golden Calf. No matter how far you have fallen as a person, or even a nation, the door to repentance is always open.

Less Olam Hazeh

Rabbi Meir Simchah HaCohen of Dvinsk, the *Meshech Chochmah*, (Vayikra 23:42) informs us that the dwelling in a sukkah empowers us with the ability to counter the tendency to get over-attached to the

physical world. He explains that God's Torah contains mitzvot that help a person battle against his inherent nature; and there are other mitzvot that are not intended to change one's nature, but rather to purify and refine a person's existing, inherent nature.

The mitzvah of sukkah helps us accomplish the former:

אחרי שהאדם הוא עמל בשדה כל הקיץ, יחרוש, יזרע, ויעדור, ויקצור, ויעמר, ועמל בשדה, ויאסוף את גרנו, ואסמיו מלאו בר, ולבו שמח בפרי עמלו, מה מתוקה לו מנוחתו להסתופף בצל ביתו. אז באה התורה ואמרה: צא מדירת קבע ושב בדירת ארעי! זה נגד הטבע לקדש כוחות האדם והרגשותיו מגבול החמרי... אמנם, יש מצוות שהן כפי חוקי הטבע. רק שהוא על פי חוקי החכמה העליונה בפרטים מצוינים לפי טעמי החכמה האלקית ... והנה מחק הטבעי לשמוח עת האסיף בזרעונים ובעטרות של שבליים - כנהוג בין העמים - על זה באה התורה והגבילה ד' מינים



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ידועים בקבלה, ואמרה "ושמחתם לפני ה' שבעת ימים".

After a person toils in the field plowing, planting, cultivating, reaping, and bundling; working in the field to gather the produce; filling the storehouse with the produce; and then rejoicing in the result of the labor, it would be so sweet to be able to rest at home. At that very moment the Torah instructs us to leave our homes and to enter temporary dwellings in order to sanctify our natural tendencies and feelings by limiting the influence of the physical world ... However, there are other mitzvot that teach us to do what we would naturally desire. These mitzvot contain details which are given according to God's wisdom ... It is human nature to celebrate at the time of the ingathering of the produce with the different types of produce that have been gathered, as is common throughout the world. For this the Torah comes and specifies taking the four species, and instructs us to rejoice with them for seven days.

While the sukkah detaches us from the physical world, the *arba minim*, four species, allow us to celebrate our physical riches at the same time. These two mitzvot represent the conflict between the physical world and spiritual world. Ultimately the sukkah and *arba minim* work in tandem, they are two parts of the same whole. Although the *arba minim* can be shaken anywhere, according to some traditions, the preferred place to shake the *arba minim* is in the sukkah itself. The sukkah therefore becomes a dwelling place for the *arba minim*. This way we perform a mitzvah (shaking the *arba minim*) while being surrounded by another mitzvah, (the sukkah). We live in a physical world and perform mitzvot that are physical in nature. Our job is to take the physical and elevate it so that physical acts can become spiritual experiences.

What else does the Sukkah help us achieve?

Leave Your Home — Leave This World Behind

The sukkah, says Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Derash Moshe, Derash 22*), teaches us to internalize that this world is only a means to the World to Come:

הנה דור המדבר שהשיגו מדריגה גדולה מאד כנביאים וזכו לענני כבוד מ"מ סוכות ממש ג"כ עשו להם פי' שהוצרכו להיות במדבר ארבעים שנה ולחיות רק חיי עראי ולאכול מן כדי ללמוד ולשנן שהעולם הוא רק פרוודור כדי ששכיבואו לארץ לא ישתקעו בחיי ההבל. *The generation in the desert, which achieved a very high spiritual level like that of the prophets, and merited the Clouds of Glory, nevertheless also sat in actual booths. The explanation why they needed both the Clouds of Glory and to sit in booths, is that they needed to be in the desert for forty years and live a temporal existence and eat the Manna in order to learn to internalize that this world is only a passageway to the future world. In this way, when they would enter the Land of Israel, they would not become absorbed in a mundane existence.*

The sukkah is like a portal into Olam Habah. It acts as a device to keep us unattached to the temporal world of Olam Hazeh, and keep us connected to Olam Habah. Just like the Clouds of Glory and the huts we erected in the desert reminded us of G-d's ultimate protection and the future world of Israel we were about to enter, the sukkah is reminding us that we are headed into the future world of Olam Habah, a place of higher existence, where Hashem's presence will more palpably be felt. An amazing story told about the Chafetz Chaim illustrates this idea perfectly.

Where's Your Furniture?

One day the Chafetz Chaim was visited by a small group of travelers from a far off town in Europe. Upon entering the Chafetz Chaim's home they were struck by how humble and sparse his abode was. Seeing the lack of contents in the home of the great tzaddik, one of the men blurted out in surprise, "Rebbi, where is your furniture?" Without missing a beat the Chafetz Chaim responded, "Where is your furniture?" Smiling, the man said, "We don't live here, we are just passing through." Upon which the Chafetz Chaim responded, "So am I."

This may answer the original question we began this essay with. Why does the Torah demand for us to live in the sukkah day and night and why do we have to be surrounded by the sukkah, thereby fulfilling the mitzvah with our entire body? The answer may be related to what the sukkah does for us, building our faith in Hashem and reminding us of Olam Habah. Faith is something we build with our entire being. To grow in faith, we need to invest our entire being. One body part isn't sufficient in helping us grow in faith. It can't just be our sense or sight, hearing, touch or speech that engages in faith. Faith involves our hearts — how we feel, our minds — how we think, and every part of our life. That means a full investment of our very selves.

How does all this relate to the sukkah being a part of Olam Habah?

The World to Come is defined in the Gemarah (*Berachot 17a*) in the following manner:

מרגלא בפומיה דרב [לא כעולם הזה העולם הבא] העולם הבא אין בו לא אכילה ולא שתיה ולא פריה ורביה ולא משא ומתן ולא קנאה ולא שנאה ולא תחרות אלא צדיקים יושבין ועטרותיהם בראשיהם ונהנים מזיו השכינה.

A favorite saying of Rav was: "The future world is not like this world. In the future world, there is neither eating, nor drinking, nor propagation, nor business, nor jealousy, nor hatred, nor competition. Rather, the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads enjoying the radiance of the Divine Presence."

This may not be a good description of the sukkah experience, but it is revealing in how closely we connect to Olam Habah through the sukkah. For one whole week, we give up the creature comforts of our homes. Rich or poor, smart or foolish, successful or not so, every Jew replaces their home for a leaky roofed hut made of naturally grown items that are disconnected from the earth, and which have never been fashioned into any form of a meaningful vessel. How much jealousy can be aroused from watching anyone live in such a hut? How much hatred? How much competition? All this brilliantly recreates the basic framework of Olam Habah, while at the same time allowing us to celebrate the time of year and miracles that our ancestors experienced after leaving Egypt.

Don't "Kick" Your Sukkah, or any Mitzvah

The Gemarah in *Avodah Zarah* 3a-b, tells us that Hashem will use the sukkah as a test for the nations of the world. The mitzvah of sukkah, says the Gemarah, is an easy mitzvah as it does not entail a major financial sacrifice. It will therefore be chosen as a way to determine whether the nations of

the world would have been worthy of the Torah. The nations will then construct and dwell in their sukkot. G-d will then test them by allowing the scorching heat of the sun to pierce their sukkot. This burning heat will leave them so frustrated with the mitzvah that they will storm out of

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their sukkah and kick it in aggravation as they leave.

Rava is puzzled by this, and wonders why the nations should be judged harshly for this reaction to leaving the sukkah from the heat. Aren't the Jewish people also exempt from this mitzvah in uncomfortable conditions — *mitztaer patur min hasukkah*? The Gemarah answers that although the nations had the right to leave the sukkah, they didn't need to show their disdain by kicking it as they left.

I believe this Gemarah demonstrates another valuable lesson when it comes to mitzvah observance, especially

in relation to how our children see us perform mitzvot. Many times, performance of mitzvot takes our time, money and comfort. When this happens, we sometimes display our frustration and show the members of our family how irritated we are with the obligations G-d and His Torah have placed upon us. While we are human, and we all sometimes experience challenges in the face of performing mitzvot, not allowing these frustrations to overtake our experience of Torah and mitzvot is key.

This is especially important when it comes to our children watching how we react to a life of mitzvot. As Rav Moshe Feinstein once pointed out, many Jews left Judaism because their parents kept their mitzvot with a "kvetch." By listening to their parents constantly complain about Judaism in the modern age with high tuition bills, expensive kosher food, Jewish people misbehaving in the public eye etc., and not focusing on the positive aspects of Jewish life, our children's connection to an authentic Torah Judaism can be damaged. You can sometimes leave the sukkah, but don't "kick" it on the way out. We should teach our children that a Torah life isn't always the most convenient, but it's still the right thing to do, and we love it.

May we all see the coming of the Mashiach and enjoy the real sukkah celebration of Olam Habah speedily in our days.



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Get Your Head in the Clouds

The Timeless Message of the Sukkah

When accused of having our “head in the clouds,” we usually respond defensively. We naturally expect of each other and of ourselves to be attentive, aware and focused on our immediate surroundings at all times. Whether preoccupied with a particular task, engaged in a conversation or immersed in deep introspection, we are more productive and effective when we are mentally and emotionally present.

Yet according to Rebbi Eliezer, having our “head in the clouds” is precisely the mindset that we are to maintain while seeking to achieve optimal fulfillment of the mitzvah of *yeshivas sukkah*. The Torah, while instructing us to sit in a sukkah for seven days, uncharacteristically embellishes this directive by way of an explicit revelation of the underlying reason for this mitzvah. In Vayikra chapter 23, the Torah states:

בַּסֻּכּוֹת תֵּשְׁבוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כָּל הָאֶזְרָח בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשְׁבוּ בַּסֻּכּוֹת. לְמַעַן יִדְעוּ דֹרֹתֵיכֶם כִּי בַּסֻּכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

You shall dwell in temporary shelters for seven days. All native-born Israelites are to live in such shelters. So your descendants will know that I had the children of Israel live in temporary shelters when I brought them out of Egypt. I am Hashem your G-d.

On the surface, the Torah’s precise intent in this context does not seem even slightly ambiguous, nor is there



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any apparent need for commentary. Quite to the contrary, the Torah’s message seems abundantly clear: we sit in a sukkah in order that we should come to remember the sukkah. Quite simple. Surprisingly however, the rabbis of the Mishna debate the true meaning and consequence of this pasuk. The Talmud in *Maseches Sukkah* 11a, records the following braisa:

תָּנִיחַ כִּי בַסֻּכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲנִי כְבוֹד הוּא, דְּבַרֵּי רַבִּי אֵלִיעֶזֶר. רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא אוֹמֵר סוּכּוֹת מִמַּשׁ עָשׂוּ לָהֶם.

It was taught in a braisa, “that I had the children of Israel live in temporary shelters,” these were the clouds of glory, so are the words of Rebbi Eliezer. Rebbi Akiva says, literal huts were made for them.

Rebbi Akiva is of the opinion that the Torah means exactly what it says: we sit in the sukkah to commemorate the huts that protected us from the sweltering heat and the harmful elements as we wandered aimlessly through the desert. Yet remarkably, Rebbi Eliezer offers a dramatically different perspective. Sitting in the sukkah represents something far more profound, even transcendent. According to his opinion, sitting in the sukkah serves to commemorate

the special protection that we received from the *Ananei Hakavod*, the Clouds of Glory, whose hovering presence provided unceasing divine protection throughout our sojourns in the desert.

This debate is neither abstract nor inconsequential, rather it is one that bears significant practical implications. Rebbi Eliezer and Rebbi Akiva are presenting us with two divergent views regarding the prescribed mindset and focus that one should strive to achieve while sitting in the sukkah.

The *Tur*, in his introduction to the laws of sukkah, adopts a definite position in this debate. In *Tur, Orach Chaim siman* 625, he writes:

וְהוֹסוּכּוֹת שֶׁאֹמֵר הַכְּתוּב שֶׁהוֹשִׁיבֵנו בָּהֶם, הֵם עֲנֵי כְבוֹדוֹ שֶׁהִקִּיפּוּ בָּהֶם לְבַל יִכָּה בָּהֶם שֶׁרַב וְשֶׁמֶשׁ. וְדוּגְמָא לְזוּה צִיוּנוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת סוּכּוֹת, כְּדִי שֶׁנִּזְכָּר נִפְלְאוֹתָיו וְנִזְכָּרָתוֹ.

The sukkos regarding which the verse teaches they were given to dwell in, is a reference to the Clouds of Glory that surrounded them, protecting them from the heat and the sun. We are instructed to make sukkos as a reenactment of this experience, in order to remind us of His miracles and wonders.

That the *Tur* should even remark on such an issue, let alone assume

a particular position, is notably uncharacteristic. The *Tur* does not ordinarily offer opinion or insight regarding the reasons for mitzvot. Rather the *Tur* devotes his work to present a comprehensive overview of halacha; the “do’s and don’ts,” not the “whys.” Yet when introducing the mitzvah of sukkah, the *Tur* clearly departs from that protocol, examining the very reason for the mitzvah of *yeshivas sukkah*. The *Bach*, ad loc., who raises this concern, explains that the *Tur* assumes this mitzvah to be one of several exceptions to the aforementioned rule. The *Tur* specifically addresses the reason for this mitzvah because when it comes to this particular mitzvah, the prescribed mindset and recommended *kavanah* is an indispensable component of its complete fulfillment. The *Tur* intuitively understands this, argues the *Bach*, because the Torah itself, again uncharacteristically, goes “out of its way” to say “*l’ma’an yeidu dorosaychem*” — “in order that future generations should know.” It is on this basis that the *Tur* deviates from his customary style and reminds us how essential it is for one to achieve this focus and *kavana* while fulfilling the mitzvah.

While reflecting upon these two opinions of the tannaim, a striking question comes to the surface. According to Rebbi Akiva, it is quite understandable how sitting in a sukkah can effectively remind one of the experience of sitting in a sukkah. We need not be imaginative, nor creative in any way. Simply being in the moment and connecting with our surroundings should be more than sufficient to enable us to generate the requisite awareness for fulfilling the mitzvah. According to Rebbi Eliezer, on the other hand, it is quite perplexing to understand how sitting

in a sukkah is similar or reminiscent of the experience of being shielded by a protective cloud. The structure of a sukkah bears no apparent resemblance to a cloud and provides no natural outlet for such a mindset.

Rav Nissim Alpert z”l, *Limmudei Nisan*, Vayikra 23:42, concedes that there is, in fact, nothing that we can possibly construct on this earth that can adequately simulate the experience of being protected by a cloud. Clouds are practically invisible, forever elusive and, if anything, generate feelings of instability, exposure and vulnerability. Neither brick and mortar, nor fiberglass, canvas or wood, can serve to create a space that resembles the delicate features of a cloud. Perhaps, argues Rav Alpert, that is precisely the point. The notion that we were protected by the *Ananei Hakavod* in the desert is, at its core, synonymous with the concept of *hashgacha pratis* (divine intervention). In order to successfully connect with the memory of protection and shelter provided by Clouds of Glory, we must necessarily envision transcendence, rather than succumb to illusions of earthly spaces of shelter. On Sukkot we are called upon to remember that our every need, without exception, is provided for by the One above.

If this is indeed the case, then why are we instructed to leave our homes? Could we not (simply) engage in focused meditation and deep introspection, enabling us to achieve an inspired awareness of divine protection, all from the familiar comforts of our own homes? Explains Rav Alpert z”l, herein lies the dilemma. Ironically, it is precisely from within the familiar confines of our permanent structures where our

vision suddenly becomes clouded. Because our natural shelters and our homes create a façade of genuine safety and protection, our ability to perceive *hashgacha pratis* often becomes considerably obstructed. When surrounded by four walls and a roof, it is much easier to lose sight of our true and complete dependency upon G-d, and to instead succumb to the self-generated myths of independence and dominance.

Therefore, the Torah instructs us to temporarily extricate ourselves from our permanent structures, to break away from our comfortable and familiar settings, and take a seat directly beneath the stars. Rather than obstruct our view, the *schach* widens our perspective and sharpens our focus. The immediate instinctual feelings of exposure and defenselessness are soon replaced with feelings of security and protection. It is precisely within the temporary and frail structure of the sukkah that one can begin to achieve a true and genuine sense of divine shelter and safety.

It would seem that the message of the sukkah has never been more relevant than it is today; indeed, its message speaks directly to an early 21st-century generation bombarded with unprecedented challenges and temptations. Technology has enabled us to create virtual walls and structures, providing us with a continuous sense of safety and protection. Whether it is the security provided to us by digital firewalls or our grossly exaggerated confidence in unlimited access to knowledge and information, we are living in a time where many of us have ever-inflating illusions of omnipotence and immortality. Anyone with a

smartphone in his hand wields access, potential and power, all of which could only have been imagined a generation ago — if even that! One would naturally expect that such extraordinary scientific advancements would yield measurable improvements in the emotional stability and mental health of our generation. Having the world at our fingertips should be more than enough to bring calm and reassurance to those who would otherwise be anxious, and restore faith and stability to society's most emotionally compromised and spiritually vulnerable. Remarkably however, studies have shown the opposite to be true.¹ Recent advancements in technology seem to be triggering an unprecedented surge in anxiety and depression.² At first glance, such developments seem counterintuitive. Shouldn't our generation, blessed with unlimited access and control, feel greater safety and security than previous generations? Should we not be observing a marked decrease in anxiety and social withdrawal?

Once again, the mitzvos of the Torah, which are both immutable and eternally relevant, provide us with the necessary insight we would otherwise be lacking. Permanent structures, while providing us with protection from the elements, do not ultimately satisfy our innate need for feelings of purpose and transcendence. Access to information and the capacity to digitally monitor and control one's home and finances, while convenient

in many respects, are grossly inadequate substitutes for genuine feelings of *emunah* and *bitachon* (faith and reliance on G-d). Being connected to a worldwide network, while affording us the opportunity to instantaneously communicate with millions of people at the click of a button, often creates feelings of existential loneliness, rather than genuine comradery and connection. The Torah provides us with a solution, which is both simple and profound:

אמרה תורה כל שבעת הימים צא מדירת קבע
ושב בדירת עראי.

The Torah says that for seven days one should leave his permanent dwelling and live in a temporary dwelling.

Sukkah 2b

We must designate times in our life, during which we extricate ourselves, albeit temporarily, from the façades of safety and security, and seek shelter in the warm protective cover of the Clouds of Glory. These clouds can be accessed when, and only when, we walk away from our desktops, turn off our smartphones and disconnect from our familiar “reality,” which is truly virtual (at best). The imperative to seek shelter in the *Ananei Hakavod* is more essential today than ever before. The more technologically advanced our world becomes, the more urgent and indispensable the need for spiritual cultivation and emotional reinforcement. These engagements cannot be initiated by downloading and accessing a particular app. These processes are not the products of

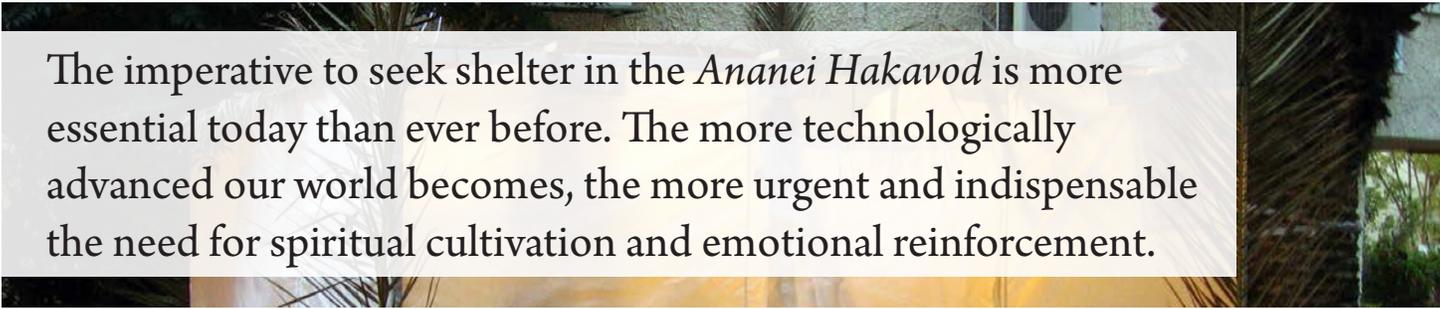
a carefully scripted digital code, nor facilitated through an online service. They occur in the very spaces and places where they have been successfully conducted for centuries. We become more spiritually attuned in houses of worship and study. We become more emotionally adapted and fortified through meaningful connections with friends and family. We become more spiritually stable and secure by strengthening our connection to G-d, through prayer and study. We offset feelings of worthlessness and helplessness by recognizing the constant *hashgacha pratis* that we have in our lives. We can mitigate and even overcome invading thoughts of worry and doubt by pulling ourselves away from our digital devices and strengthening our connection to our Father in heaven.

Herein lies the timeless message of the sukkah. Ultimately, the sukkah offers each and every one of us an opportunity for spiritual rejuvenation and growth. May we be inspired to truly escape our permanent dwellings and seek shelter in the secure and sustaining walls of the sukkah, thereby deepening and strengthening our connection to *Avinu shebashamayim*.

Endnotes

1 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/10/style/anxiety-is-the-new-depression-xanax.html>

2 <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/has-the-smartphone-destroyed-a-generation/534198/>



The imperative to seek shelter in the *Ananei Hakavod* is more essential today than ever before. The more technologically advanced our world becomes, the more urgent and indispensable the need for spiritual cultivation and emotional reinforcement.

Menucha: The Gift of All Gifts

Change is exciting, bringing with it the opportunity to reimagine, reevaluate, and reshape our lives while also solidifying and reaffirming timeless values and commitments. It also has a way of heightening insecurities, uncertainty, and concerns about the unknown.

All at once, change has the potential to be invigorating, frightening, emboldening, and frustrating. Yet the only way to go from one stage to the next is to work within those two poles.

Finding the balance is a fine idea. The question is, how?

There are a number of important traits and skills that enable us to move through change in a positive, encouraging way. Yet there is one that is the gift of all gifts, both on the individual and collective level, and it is found in the haftara for Shemini Atzeret.

Defining an Era

The scene begins with a young King Solomon finishing up a lengthy prayer to Hashem in front of the newly inaugurated Bet HaMikdash on behalf of the Jewish people. When he faces the crowd to usher them into the new and long-dreamed of ideal era of Jewish history, he opens his address with the following statement:

ברוך ה' אֲשֶׁר נָתַן מְנוּחָה לְעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּכֹל
אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לֹא נִכְלַד דְּבַר אֶחָד מִכֹּל דְּבָרָיו הַטּוֹב
אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה עַבְדּוֹ.

Blessed is Hashem who gave menucha to His nation Israel, just as He said He would. Not a single word has failed of all the gracious promises that He made



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through His servant Moses.

Melachim I 8:56

As they begin a new chapter, Solomon wants the Jewish nation to know that they are beginning it with something special, something G-d given, that Hashem promised for generations: *menucha*. Several commentators, including Radak, conclude that this refers to respite from the harassment of enemies. Finally, after thousands of years of being concerned with emancipation, escape, and their overall security, the Jews are entering the long-promised epoch of *menucha*.

God's Gift

Oftentimes, *menucha* is translated as “rest” or “tranquility,” and while those are two aspects of what *menucha* is and feels like, they are not the full picture. To get a deeper sense of what *menucha* is, let's take a look at a scene from the Book of Rut. After the death of her husband and sons, Naomi is bidding farewell to her Moabit daughters-in-law as she embarks back on the journey to her homeland, Canaan. They've all suffered the tremendous loss of their husbands, and each must build their lives anew:

וְהָאִמְרָן נְעָמִי לְשֵׁתִי כִלְתִּי לְכָנָה שִׁבְנָה אִשָּׁה
לְבֵית אִמָּה יְעֵשָׂה [יְעֵשָׂה] ה' עִמָּכֶם חֶסֶד כְּאִשָּׁר
עָשִׂיתֶם עִם הַמֹּתִים וְעַמְדִּי יִתֵּן ה' לָכֶם וּמִצָּאֵן
מְנוּחָה אִשָּׁה בֵּית אִישָׁה וְתִשְׁקֶן לָהֶן וְתִשְׂאֲנֶה

קוֹלָן וְתִבְרָכֶינָה.

And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Each of you, go back and return to your mother's house, May Hashem deal kindly with you as you have dealt kindly with the deceased and with me. May G-d grant that each of you find menucha in the house of a husband.” And she kissed them farewell. They broke into weeping.

Rut 1:8-9

The Malbim points out that Naomi is wishing more than kindness for them, but also “a gift.” Whatever they choose — whether it is to live in their mother's home or to build new homes with new husbands — they should “dwell only in tranquility and calm. This will be Hashem's gift.” Whatever they choose, they should be at peace with that choice, without any doubts, regrets, or nagging questions. Essentially, she wishes them a sense of inner security, a grounding that comes from within, and for good reason: the gift of *menucha* is the freedom to live fully focused in the moment.

Redefining Living in the Moment

Over the centuries “living in the moment” has become associated with living a hedonistic lifestyle. However, not living in the moment can be just as damaging. When psychologists

Matthew A. Killingsworth and Daniel T. Gilbert conducted a study¹ on mind-wandering and its effects on happiness, they found that 46.9 percent of the time, their subjects' thoughts were not focused on what they were doing in the present. Oftentimes, individuals were focused on something that happened in the past, or something that they were anticipating in the future. While this is natural — our brains are wired to recognize and protect us from danger and threat — it is equally important to be in touch with life as it is *actually* taking place.

A Natural Resource

One of the encouraging things about *menucha* is that it's a built in, natural part of the world and thus part of human nature. Though our fast-paced world may make it seem like it's something beyond us, it's a natural resource available to each and every person who is willing to work for it. When Rashi comments on the words "And G-d finished on the seventh day" (Bereshit 2:3), he explains, "what did

the world lack until then? *Menucha* — the Shabbat came, *menucha* came, and with that the work was complete." Only once the world had an outlet of *menucha* was it a finished product. This goes to show that no matter how far we feel from it, or how out of reach it may seem, a strong sense of inner security is accessible to us at all times.

Shaya Ostrov, LCSW, a therapist specializing in premarital and marital counseling and author of *The Menuchah Principle*, suggests using methods of mindfulness to get in touch with this part of ourselves: "Set aside time every day to meditate on what is really important in life. Shut off your technology during these times, so you can be alone with G-d, and with yourself."² Writing down what we learn in these moments is also a good way to bring our thoughts and values to life, and to have them for us whenever we need a reminder.

Giving Ourselves That Gift

Cultivating *menucha* isn't easy, and as Shlomo's and Naomi's stories

demonstrate, it takes work and effort. However, it's also something that is essential to our existence. We are partners with Hashem in creating that *menucha*, and in maintaining it. In times of change and transition, we crave certainty more than ever, and by being deeply in tune with what matters to us most, no matter what circumstances arise, we tap into an inner strength and focus that isn't easily swayed or diverted. Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz commented that this is why the Torah was given in the desert — a place of transition and challenge.³ *Menucha* isn't freedom from struggle, it is the freedom to have a focus in life no matter what comes our way, and to, *b'ezrat Hashem*, appreciate our lives from moment to moment.

Endnotes

1 <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2010/11/wandering-mind-not-a-happy-mind/>

2 <https://www.ou.org/life/relationships/answer-commitment-phobia-part-ii-shaya-ostrov/>

3 <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/14239>



Menucha Plays a Role in the Sukkah Experience

כל שבעת הימים קורא ולומד בתוך הסוכה ... אמנם אם לפי עומק עיונו בלימודו קשה לו העיון בסוכה יכול ללמוד בביתו כיון שלימוד זה א"א לו בסוכה וק"ו הדברים דאם בצער הגוף אמרו דמצטער פטור מן הסוכה וכ"ש בעינוי נפש דתורה דצריך שתהא דעתו מיושבת עליו ולעניין תפלה ... נכון להתפלל בסוכה אם יש לו מקום מנוחה בסוכתו שיכול להתפלל שם

All seven days, one should read and study [Torah] in the sukkah. ... However, if by learning in the sukkah, it becomes difficult to concentrate on analysis of the text, one may learn in one's home since this type of study is not possible in the sukkah. This is logical because if [the rabbis] said that one is exempt from the sukkah for physical discomfort, certainly spiritual discomfort from the inability to study Torah properly with serenity [should serve as an exemption]. ... Regarding prayer, it is proper to pray in the sukkah if there is a place in the sukkah where one can pray in a state of menucha.

Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Chaim 639:19

The Malach of Hoshana Rabbah

Do not grieve, for the joy of G-d is your strength.

Nechemiah 8:10

בכל יום מקיפין את המזבח פעם אחת ואומרים אנא ד' הושיעה נא אנא ד' הצליחה נא. רבי יהודה אומר אני והו הושיעה נא.

ואותו היום מקיפין את המזבח שבעה פעמים.

Every day they would circle the altar once and say, "Please, G-d, save us now! Please, G-d, make us succeed now!"

Rabbi Yehudah says, "Ani Vaho, save us now." And on that day [Hoshana Rabbah] they circled the altar seven times.

Mishnah, Succah ch. 4

וכיצד הוא סדר ההקפה? כל ישראל גדולים וקטנים נוטלים את לולביהם בידיהם הימנית ואתרוגיהם בידיהם השמאלית ומקיפין אחת, ואותו היום היו מקיפין שבע פעמים. אמר ר' חייא זכר ליריחו.

הא תינח בזמן שיש מזבח, בזמן הזה חזן הכנסת עומד כמלאך האלקים וס"ת בזרועו,

והעם מקיפין אותו דוגמת מזבח:

What is the order of circling? All Israel, old and young, take their lulavim in their right hands and their etrogim in their left hands and circle once. And on that day [Hoshana Rabbah] they circle seven times. Rabbi Chiya said: This is a memorial for Yericho.

That's fine when there is an altar. Today, the chazan of the gathering stands like a malach of G-d, with a Torah scroll in his arm, and the congregation circles him, like the altar.

Yalkut Shimoni to Tehillim #703



Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

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The image of making a daily circuit around the bimah, upon which one member of the congregation holds a Torah, is well-known. Rabbi Chiya's association with the conquest of Yericho¹ is visible, both in the act of circling and in our appeal to Divine aid in our time of need. But why is the person holding the Torah compared to a *malach*, a Divine agent? To appreciate the comparison, let us examine why we perform the Hoshanot circuits.

The Hoshanot

One traditional understanding of Hoshanot is that this ritual is part of our annual appeal for rain. The prophet Zechariah declared that seasonal rainfall can be a Divine response to the Succot pilgrimage to the Beit haMikdash.² A mishnah informs us that our annual rainfall is determined by G-d on Succot.³ And in the Talmud, Rabbi Eliezer states explicitly that the mitzvah of taking the *arba minim* on Succot is a prayer for rain.⁴ In that light, carrying the *arba minim* around the bimah, and

crying out, "Save us," is a plea for the rain our crops need. However, there is another way to view Hoshanot: As a victory march.

In the words of a midrash, commenting on the last words of Tehillim 16:11:

ואמרי רבנן לולב בימין ואתרוג בשמאל. מה טעם? "נעימות בימין נצח," במי שהוא נוטל לולב בימין ונוצח ובאין. בנוהג שבעולם הנדייסין רצין באיפרכוס, מי נוטל ובא? מי שהוא נוצח.

כך בראש השנה באין כל באי עולם ועוברין לפניו כבני מרון, ואף ישראל עוברין לפניו עם כל באי עולם, ושרי אומות העולם אומרים "אנו נצחנו וזכינו בדין," ואין אדם יודע מי נצח, אם ישראל נוצחים או אומות העולם. עבר ראש השנה וכל ישראל באים ביום הכפורים ומתענים בו, ולובשים בגדים לבנים ונאים. עבר יום הכפורים ואין אדם יודע מי נוצח, אם ישראל אם אומות העולם. כיון שהגיע יום טוב הראשון של חג, וכל ישראל גדולים וקטנים נוטלין לולביהם בימנם, ואתרוגיהם בשמאלם, מיד הכל יודעין שישראל נוצחין בדין. וכיון שהגיע יום הושענא רבה, נוטלין ערבי נחל, ומקיפין שבע הקפות, וחזן הכנסת עומד כמלאך אלקים, וספר תורה בזרועו, והעם מקיפין אותו דוגמת המזבח.



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And the Sages said: The lulav in the right and the etrog in the left [while circling the altar]. Why? “The pleasant items are in your right, for victory. (Tehillim 16:11)” This refers to the one who takes the lulav in the right and is victorious with the branches. Customarily, competitors race in the arena, and who takes the branches? The one who wins. So, too, on Rosh HaShanah, all who enter the world come and pass before Him, like sheep, and Israel too passes before Him with all of the others who enter this world. And the nobles of the nations say, “We won, we triumphed in the judgment,” and no one knows who won, whether Israel won or the nations. Rosh HaShanah passes, and all Israel comes on Yom Kippur and fasts, wearing white, beautiful clothing. Yom Kippur passes and no one knows who won, Israel or the nations.

When the first day of Succot arrives, all Israel, old and young, take their lulavim in their right hands and their etrogim in their left. Immediately, everyone knows that Israel has triumphed in judgment. And when the day of Hoshana Rabbah arrives, they take willow branches and circle seven times, and the chazan of the gathering stands like a malach of G-d, with a Torah scroll in his arm, and the nation circles him like the altar.

Midrash Tehillim 17:5⁵

In the eyes of this midrash, the focus of our Hoshanot is not on our plea for Divine aid, despite our “Save us” cry. Rather, this is primarily a celebration of the acceptance of our earlier pleas.

Bar Kochba’s Coins

The image of the *arba minim* as a sign of victory may also be seen in the 2nd-century coins of Bar Kochba, which include *shekalim* marked with the image of a lulav bundle.

Some contend that Bar Kochba may have perceived in Succot an image of national redemption and sovereignty appropriate to his cause.⁶ The first Beit haMikdash was dedicated just before Succot,⁷ and the altar of the second Beit haMikdash was dedicated likewise just in time for Succot.⁸ Historical sources suggest that the eight days of the original Chanukah celebration, marking rededication of the second Beit haMikdash, may have been modeled on the eight days of Succot.⁹ And so Bar Kochba may have adopted Succot as a rallying point.

However, others¹⁰ contend that Bar Kochba may have selected the branches of the lulav bundle as a symbol of triumph, as presented in the midrash above. For centuries, Jews who had come to the Beit haMikdash on Succot had been invited into the interior *Heichal* to march around the altar with their branches held high, declaring victory in our judgment before G-d. Now Bar Kochba borrowed that image for his own campaign.

The Malach

In this victorious context, the holder of the sefer Torah functions as a *malach*, a representative of G-d, conveying to us the news of our victory and contributing to an atmosphere of triumph. Indeed, the midrash cited above continues to say that when we circle the altar, “Immediately the ministering *malachim* rejoice, declaring, ‘Israel has won! Israel has won!’”

The *malach* as herald and celebrant of victory is well-established in Tanach. Yehoshua was visited by a *malach* who declared himself to be an officer of G-d’s army, signifying that G-d

would bring Yehoshua military victory over Yericho.¹¹ Gidon was visited by a *malach* to herald the defeat of Midian.¹² And Hatzlelponi, mother of Shimshon, was visited by a *malach* who foretold the birth of her son, who would begin to rescue the Jews from the Plishtim.¹³ Along these lines, the *malach* at the center of our Hoshanot is a Divine representative, announcing our victory in judgment before Hashem, and rejoicing with us.

The celestial *malach* is not necessarily seen in the human holder of the Torah, though; the emphasis may be on the Torah itself. Indeed, according to Rabbi Aharon haKohen of Narbonne,¹⁴ we primarily circle the Torah. The only reason we have someone stand in the center is in order to honor the Torah by holding it. The Torah itself is G-d’s representative, broadcasting the news of our victory.¹⁵

The Basis for our Confidence

One problem remains, though: How do we know that we have been victorious? How can we hold a triumphant parade and claim that a *malach* has arrived to certify this win?

One might contend that we are always confident that G-d is “on our side,” as the *Tur* asserts regarding rejoicing on Rosh HaShanah.¹⁶ However, our midrash emphasizes that we do not know whether we triumphed in judgment. Rather, an alternative answer may lie in Abbaye’s classic justification for the symbolism-rich menu of Rosh HaShanah:

אמר אביי, השתא דאמרת: סימנא מילתא היא, [לעולם] יהא רגיל למיחזי בריש שתא קרא ורוביא, כרתי וסילקא ותמרי.
Abbaye said: Since we say that signs are substantive, one should accustom himself

to see gourds and fenugreek, leek, beets and dates at the start of the year.¹⁷

Commentators suggest that the central function of these symbols is to inspire optimism.¹⁸ As Nechemiah instructed the Jews of his generation on Rosh HaShanah, “Go eat rich foods and drink sweet drinks, and send portions to those who have none prepared, for today is sacred to our Master. Do not grieve, for the joy of G-d is your strength.”¹⁹

Use of symbols to inspire optimism is not unique to Rosh HaShanah. When Yehonatan, son of King Saul, sought to attack the Plishtim, he determined whether to proceed based on the words he heard from the Plishtim when they spotted him. He planned:

אם כה יאמרו אלינו דמו עד הגיענו אליכם
ועמדנו תחתינו ולא נעלה אליהם. ואם כה
יאמרו עלו עלינו ועלינו כי נתנם ה' בידנו וזה
לנו האות.

If they say to us thus, 'Be still until we reach you,' then we will remain in our place, and not ascend to them. But if they say to us thus, 'Ascend to us,' then we will ascend, for G-d has given them into our hands, and this is our sign.

Shemuel I 14:9-10

As Rabbi David Kimchi (Radak) explained, this was a message he would hear, strengthening his heart, as a sign and symbol regarding the venture.

Perhaps, then, this is the role of our

victory march around the altar in the Beit haMikdash, and around the bimah in the synagogue. Any new initiative requires confidence, and this is certainly true as we emerge from Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur and begin the new year. To inspire confidence, on each day of Succot we bear the lulav bundle which signifies victory, and call upon G-d to “save us,” making good on that victory by bringing us salvation and success. We rally around the Torah that is G-d’s message to us, and its bearer is transformed for us into a *malach* like those who inspired Yehoshua, Gidon and the Hatzlelponi. On the seventh day, Hoshana Rabbah, we make seven such circuits, as we did in our victory over Yericho. And armed with this sense of victory, inspired by the image of G-d’s *malach*, we march into the new year, ready to manage the challenges which come our way.

Endnotes

- 1 Yehoshua 6.
- 2 Zechariah 14:17.
- 3 Mishnah Rosh HaShanah, Perek 1.
- 4 Talmud, *Taanit* 2b; and see *Vayikra Rabbah* 30:13 as well.
- 5 Translated in part based on Aruch *hindivisin* and notes of Salomon Buber at http://www.hebrewbooks.org/pagefeed/hebrewbooks_org_14295_258.pdf. A similar idea may be expressed in Yalkut Shimoni Tehillim #703.

6 Dr. Paul Romanoff, *Jewish Symbols on Ancient Jewish Coins*, American Israel Numismatic Association (1971).

7 Melachim I 8.

8 Ezra 3; and see Nechemiah 8.

9 *Maccabees* II Chapter 10.

10 Avraham Tendler, “הדגמים של המקדש והפולחן במטבעות מרד בר כוכבא” accessible at <https://biu.academia.edu/AvrahamTendler>.

11 Yehoshua 5:13-15, as explained by Radak, Abarbanel and Malbim. *Sanhedrin* 44b identifies criticism for Yehoshua in the *malach*’s visit, but as noted by Radak to Yehoshua, it is difficult to sustain this on the level of *p’shat*. Radak goes so far as to claim that the author of that midrashic passage confused certain verses.

12 Shoftim 6:11-24. Radak, Abarbanel and Malbim believe that this is a *malach*; Ralbag believes it is a human prophet.

13 Shoftim 13:5.

14 *Orchot Chaim* I, *Seder Tefilot haPesach uShar haMoadot* 14.

15 For other explanations of why we circle the Torah, see *Bach, Orach Chaim* 660 and *Maharam Schick, Derashah* 63.

16 See *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 581, supporting an atmosphere of joy on Rosh HaShanah because “we know that G-d will perform a miracle on our behalf.”

17 Talmud, *Horiyot* 12a.

18 Note that Maharal (*Beer haGolah, Beer* 2) takes Abbaye’s prescription as a step with practical consequences, initiating fulfillment of an anticipated good verdict so that it will gain force by virtue of its implementation. See Ramban to Bereishit 12:6, too.

19 Nechemiah 8:10.



The Message of Gog u-Magog

The haftarot read on Shabbat Chol ha-Moed Pesach and Shabbat Chol ha-Moed Sukkot both address esoteric eschatological themes from the book of Yechezkel. On Pesach, we read about the resurrection of the dry bones and on Sukkot, we study war of *Gog u-Magog*.¹ While this gory and tumultuous story seems to contradict the joyous tone of this holiday (though not necessarily the somber tenor of Kohelet read on the same day), it is consistent with the holiday's emphasis on our relationship with the nations of the world.² In addition, there is a tradition that this war will take place during Sukkot.³ Accordingly, let us briefly explore the message of this haftara.

Chapters 38-39 of Yechezkeil describe a great war in the end of days. This is known as the war of *Gog u-Magog*, on account of the following passage:

א וַיְהִי דְבַר-ה', אֵלַי לֵאמֹר ב בֶּן-אָדָם, שִׂים פְּנֶיךָ אֶל-גּוֹג אֶרֶץ הַמְּגוּג-נְשִׂיא, רֹאשׁ כְּשֶׁף וְתַבְלִי; וְהִנְבֵּא, עָלָיו.

1 And the word of Hashem came to me, saying: 2 "Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tuval, and prophesy against him."
Yechezkeil ch. 38

Yechezkeil prophesies that Gog, the leader of a country called Magog, will lead a campaign to destroy the Jewish people in their land. He will be defeated when God reveals Himself and is sanctified before the entire world. This war also is described in Zecharya 12-13, Yirmiyahu 30, and Daniel 11-12.⁴ While the names Gog and Magog appear only in Yechezkeil,



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many commentaries assume that all of the aforementioned passages refer to the same events, though they present the cataclysmic events from differing perspectives.⁵

Magog's identity is extremely unclear. The only clue from Tanach is Bereishit 10:2, which identifies Magog as a son of Yefet, who was one of Noach's three sons. Malbim writes that we will not know what Magog is until the prophecies concerning it are fulfilled.⁶

Magog's identity is extremely unclear. Malbim writes that we will not know what Magog is until the prophecies concerning it are fulfilled.

Nevertheless, other commentators offered their own suggestions. For example, Abarbanel suggests that the war of *Gog u-Magog* will involve a great war between Christianity and Islam.⁷

When exactly will this war commence? The Zecharya-vision compares the events to the splitting of the sea, which came after the exodus from Egypt; this may indicate that the war will take place after we already have returned to our land and

restored autonomy. In fact, the story in Yechezkeil explicitly takes place after the Jews have returned to their land, when their peaceful renewal is shattered by a treacherous conflict.

Rambam writes that a simple reading of Tanach suggests that it will take place at the beginning of the messianic era, after the coming of Eliyahu:

יראה מפשוטן של דברי הנביאים, שבתחילת ימות המשיח תהיה מלחמת גוג ומגוג, ושקודם מלחמת גוג ומגוג יעמוד נביא לישר ישראל ולהכין לבם, שנאמר הנה אנכי שולח לכם את אליה וגו'.

The simple interpretation of the prophets' words implies that the war of Gog u-Magog will take place at the beginning of the messianic age. Before the war of Gog u-Magog, a prophet will arise to inspire Israel to be upright and prepare their hearts, as Malachi 3:22 states: "Behold, I am sending you Elijah." Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 12:2

Will the individual known as mashiach arrive before or after this war? Chazal seem to provide conflicting answers to this question.

Perhaps the resolution lies in the idea of two messianic figures, Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben David. The war will occur after the coming of Mashiach ben Yosef, who will lead the Jewish people in battle and fall tragically, but before the coming of Mashiach ben David.

Alternatively, Chazal may be describing different possible ways in which the redemption will unfold. Chazal frequently identify different models of redemption in the text of Tanach itself.⁸ It would not be surprising, therefore, if they themselves adopted a similar approach in their discussion of the messianic era.

The prophecies relating to the war of Gog u-Magog seem to suggest such a dichotomy. Zecharya describes significant Jewish casualties and, according to the Talmud, the death of Mashiach ben Yosef. However, Yechezkeil suggests that Gog and Magog will be destroyed in such a miraculous manner that the Jewish nation will not even have to fight:⁹

וְנִשְׁפָּטֵתִי אֶתּוֹ, בְּדָבָר וּבְדָם; וְגִשְׁם שׁוֹטֵף וְאֶבְנֵי אֶלְנָבִישׁ אֵשׁ וְנִפְרִית, אֲמַטִּיר עָלָיו וְעַל-אֲנָפָיו, וְעַל-עַמִּים רַבִּים, אֲשֶׁר אֶתּוֹ.

And I will punish him with pestilence and with blood; and I will cause to rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many peoples that are with him, an overflowing shower, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone.

Yechezkeil 38:22

While Rambam suggests a basic outline, he also reminds us that we do not really know how things will turn out:

Rambam informs us that we do not have a tradition about how exactly mashiach will come:

וכל אלו הדברים וכיוצא בהן לא ידע אדם איך יהיו עד שיהיו, שדברים סתומין הן אצל הנביאים, גם החכמים אין להם קבלה בדברים אלו, אלא לפי הכרע הפסוקים, ולפיכך יש להם מחלוקת בדברים אלו, ועל כל פנים אין סדור הייתי דברים אלו ולא דקדוקיהן עיקר בדת, ולעולם לא יתעסק אדם בדברי ההגדות, ולא יאריך במדרשות האמורים בענינים אלו וכיוצא בהן, ולא ישמם עיקר שאין מביאין לא לידי יראה ולא לידי אהבה.

*All these and similar matters cannot be [clearly] known by man until they occur, for they are undefined in the words of the prophets. **Even the sages have no established tradition regarding these matters** beyond what is implied by the verses; hence, there is divergence of opinion among them. In any case, neither the sequence of these events nor their precise details are among the fundamental principles of the faith. One should not occupy himself at length with the aggadot and midrashim that deal with these and similar matters, nor should he deem them of prime importance, for they bring one to neither awe nor love [of God].¹⁰*

Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 12:2

Rambam also discourages one from focusing on these matters, as they do not promote love and fear of God and are not fundamental matters of faith. Thus, we shall not explore the matter further. However, regardless of how the events will unfold, their ultimate purpose is the same — the revelation of God's oneness. Thus, Yechezkeil proclaims: "I will be exalted and I will be sanctified, and I will make Myself known before the eyes of many nations" (Yechezkeil 38:23). Likewise, Zecharya predicts that "On that day, God will be one and His name will be one" (Zecharya 14:9).

Indeed, it is this aspect of the wars that has become most prominent in our liturgy. We declare the verse from Zecharya at the end of Aleinu and Psukai d-zimra, and the passage from Yechezkeil serves as the basis for the prayer of Kaddish:

וְהִתְגַּדַּלְתִּי וְהִתְקַדְשִׁיתִי וְנִודַעְתִּי לְעֵינֵי גוֹיִם רַבִּים וְיָדְעוּ כִּי אֲנִי ה'.

Thus will I manifest My greatness and My holiness, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations. And they shall know that I am the Lord.

Yechezkeil 38:23

Ve-Hitgadilti ve-hitkadishti, a prophesy predicting that God's name will become great and sanctified, becomes *yitgada(i)l ve-yitkada(i)sh*, a petition asking that His great name become magnified and sanctified. With the coming of mashiach, all of humanity will recognize and serve God. Yechezkeil stresses how redemption will mark the end of the terrible *chilul ha-Sheim* that galut naturally engenders.

Likewise, *Tur* (O.C. 56) notes that the phrase "Yehei shemeih raba mevorach le-olam u-lolmei olmaya" — May His name become great and blessed forever and ever — is a petition for His name to become great. Thus, the verse in Zecharya chapter 14, also referring to the culmination of the war of Gog u-Magog, states:

בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִהְיֶה ה' אֶחָד וּשְׁמוֹ אֶחָד

On **that** day, He will be one and His name will be one.

In Kaddish, we implore God to make His name great, that is, to make His name one. This is troubling, however: is God not already one? Don't we believe that "Hashem Elokeinu Hashem echad?" What is meant by "On that day, He will be one and His name will be one?"

The way to understand this difficulty is the realization that even though we know of His oneness, when we look at the world, we do not always perceive His oneness. Cognitively, we are aware that He is just and kind, but when we see the righteous suffer, the wicked prosper, innocent children die, and infants wail from the burning pain of incurable diseases, we do not see His oneness.

This is what we mean when we say that His name is not one. God's name refers to the manner in which He

is perceived — and His oneness is not perceived in the sense that there seems to be conflicting powers and evil that we cannot explain in the world. If He truly is one, such that everything that happens is a reflection of His will, it would seem that there should not be so much suffering and apparent inequity.

In Kaddish, the prayer about the sanctification of His name, we beseech God to rectify this perversion, praying that His name truly become one. This is the meaning of “*Yehei shemeih raba mevorach l-olam u-lolmei olmaya*” — “May His name become great (complete) and blessed forever and ever.”¹¹ In that sense, Kaddish, like so many prayers, is a petition for the

arrival of *mashiach*. However, the story of *Gog u-Magog* highlights that the process of the coming of *mashiach* will not be smooth. Indeed the very returning to our land precipitates a series of tumultuous events that threatens our very existence. While these terrifying descriptions certainly scare us, they also remind us to remain faithful even when the messianic process does not unfold smoothly. We should remain confident that the ultimate conclusion will be greater than we could have ever imagined.

Endnotes

1 This practice is recorded in TB *Megilla* 31a: אמר רב הונא אמר רב שבת שחל להיות בחולו של

מועד בין בפסח בין בסוכות מקרא קרינן ראה אתה אפסורי בפסח העצמות היבשות ובסוכות ביום בא גוג.

Rav Huna said that Rav said: When Shabbat occurs on one of the intermediate days of a Festival, whether on Passover or on Sukkot, they read the Torah portion of “See, You say to me” (Exodus 33:12–34:26), as it includes the halakhot of the Festivals and the intermediate days. They read as the haftara, on Passover, from the portion of the dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1–14), which portrays redemption from servitude, and on Sukkot they read “And it shall come to pass on that day when Gog shall come” (Ezekiel 38:18–39:16), which speaks of the future redemption. (Translation: The William Davidson digital edition of the Koren Noé Talmud)

2 Indeed, we read about the same war in the haftara of the first day of Sukkot, this time from the end of the book of Zecharia. In that case, the connection to Sukkot is apparent: the passage concludes by describing how the gentile survivors of this battle will pay homage to God each year in Yerushalayim on Sukkot.

3 See *Shem mi-Shmuel*, Shabbat Chol ha-Moed Sukkot 5673, who records this ancient tradition.

4 There are other places where *Gog u-Magog* is referred to as well. For example, the Talmud (*Brachot* 10a) assumes that *Tehillim*, ch. 2, is referring to *Gog u-Magog* when it states:

(א) למה רגשו גוים ולאמים יהגו ריק: (ב) יתעבבו מלכי ארץ ורוזנים נוסדו יחד על ה' ועל משיחו.

1 Why do nations assemble, and peoples plot vain things; 2 kings of the earth take their stand, and regents intrigue together against the LORD and against His anointed?

5 According to most commentaries, the verse in *Yechezkeil* (38:17) references the verse in *Zecharya* (14:2).

כה-אמר ה' אלקים, האתה-הוא אשר-דברתי בימים קדמונים ביד עבדי נביאי ישראל, הנבאים בימים ההם, שנים להביא אתך, עליהם.

Thus said Hashem, God: “Are you he of whom I spoke in old time by My servants the prophets of Israel that prophesied in those days for many years, that I would bring you against them?”

Rashi has the following comment:

האתה הוא - באותן הימים יאמר הקב"ה האתה הוא אותו אשר דברתי בימים קדמונים ביד עבדי נביאי ישראל כגון יחזקאל חכריה שאף הוא נתנבא על מלחמות גוג ומגוג ואספתי את כל הגוים וגו' (זכריה

Leadership and Mashiach

The theme of leadership looms large in the unfolding of the messianic process as forces of good and bad. The prophet Yeshayahu offers the following description of the *melech ha-mashiach*:

א ויצא חטה מגזע ישעי ויצר, משרשיו יפרה. ב ונחה עליו, רוח ה' - רוח חכמה ובינה, רוח עצה וגבורה, רוח דעת, ויראת ה'. ג והריחו, ביראת ה'; ולא-למראה עיניו ישפוט, ולא-למשמע אזניו יוכיח. ד ושפט בצדק דלים, והוכיח במישור לענוי-ארץ; והכה-ארץ בשבט פיו, וברוח שפתיו ימית רשע. ה והיה צדק, אזור מתניו; והאמונה, אזור חלציו.

1 *And a shoot shall come out of the stock of Yishai, and a twig shall grow from his roots. 2* *And the spirit of Hashem shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Hashem. 3* *And his delight shall be in the fear Hashem; and he shall not judge based on the sight of his eyes nor decide based on the hearing of his ears; 4* *But with righteousness he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the humble of the land; and he shall smite the land with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. 5* *And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.*

Yeshayahu ch. 11

The prophet describes the *mashiach* as someone whose authority stems from his physical straight but his honesty, righteousness, and faithfulness; he shall sight the wicked not with a physical sword but “the rod of his mouth.” The *mashiach* will unite a fractured nation in a campaign of goodness and godliness. This contrasts another powerful leader of the messianic realm: *Gog*, the leader of a country called *Magog*. He too is a remarkable uniter, but of a very different sort.

יד) ורבותינו אמרו אלדד ומידד הם נתנבאו עליו זהו שנים האמור כאן אל תיקרי שנים אלא שנים (בפת"ח) שני נביאים נתנבאו נבואה א' בפרק אחד (אבל לא בסגנון אחד).

Are you he: In those days, the Holy One, blessed be He, will say, "Are you the one about whom I spoke in ancient days through My servants, the prophets of Israel, e.g. Ezekiel and Zechariah?" For he [Zechariah] too prophesied about the wars of Gog and Magog (Zech. 14:2): "And I will gather all the nations, etc." Our Sages said (Sanh. 17a): Eldad and Medad they [also] prophesied about it. That is the שנים stated here. Do not read שנים, years, but שנים, two. Two prophets prophesied one prophecy at one time (though not in the same style of expression).

See also *Metzudot David*.

6 Malbim, Yechezkeil 38:17:

ר"ל כי שם גוג ושם מגוג כבר ישכח בימים ההם עד שלא ידעו כלל מי היא האומה שנקראת בפי הנביא מגוג ושם מלכה גוג רק אז כשיבא על הארץ ויתקיימו דברי הנביא אז ידעו שזה הוא המלך גוג שנבא עליו וכו'.

The identity of God and Magog will be unknown in those days. People will not know who the nation or king is referred to by the prophet. Only then when he attacks the land and the words of the prophet are fulfilled will we know who the prophet was referring to.

7 Abarbanel, Yechezkeil ch. 38

הכוונה הכוללת בנבואה הזאת להגיד שקודם קיבוץ הגליות כשיבאו הנוצרים לכבוש את הארץ ישראל ולמשול בירושלים ויעלו עליהם אנשי המזרח וירכתי הצפון...הנה יהיה אחת מן האומות שיבוא על הנוצרים וילחמו בהם על ארץ ישראל גוי גוג וארץ המגוג שיעלו שם באותה מלחמה קהל גדול וחיל רב עמהם פרס כוש ופוט ושאר האומות.

The general intent of this prophesy is to convey that before the ingathering of the exiles, when the Christians come to conquer the land of Israel and rule over Jerusalem and against them will rise the people of the East... One of the nations that will come upon the Christians and wage war against them over the land of Israel will be a nation called Gog and a land called Magog that will come there as part of this war, a great gathering

with countries of many nations.

Many have suggested that the prophecies allude to Nazi Germany. See, for example, pp. 580-82 of the Artscroll edition of Yechezkeil by R. Moshe Eisemann (New York: Mesorah, 1977).

8 For example, Yeshayahu prophesies *be-ita achishena*, "In its time I will hasten it." The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 98a) understands this self-contradictory phrase to mean, "If they are worthy, I will hasten it. If they are not worthy, it will be in its time." The Talmud thus informs us that there is a fixed time, a *keitz*, by which *mashiach* will come no matter what. On the other hand, if we are deserving, *mashiach* will come earlier.

The issue at hand is more than a mere difference of timing. The Talmud states that if the coming of *mashiach* is earned, events will unfold in a more glorious manner:

אמר רבי אלכסנדר: רבי יהושע בן לוי רמי, כתיב וארו עם ענני שמיא כבר אנש אתה, וכתיב עני ורכב על המור! - זכו - עם ענני שמיא, לא זכו - עני ורכב על המור.

R. Alexandri said: R. Yehoshua pointed out a contradiction. It is written, "And behold, one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven," while [elsewhere] it is written, "[Behold, your king comes to you...] lowly, and riding upon a donkey." [The resolution is:] if they are meritorious, [he will come] with the clouds of heaven; if not, lowly and riding upon a donkey.

Sanhderin 98a

This distinction may serve as a way of reconciling other varying descriptions of the period before *mashiach*, many of which seem to contradict each other.

9 Though this reading cannot be demonstrated conclusively, it is the view taken by R. Moshe Feinstein in a fascinating *teshuva* that alludes to the topic:

...וברמב"ם אף שכתב בפי"א ממלכים ה"ד שמלך המשיח ילחם מלחמות ה' שיש מקום לומר שיהיה בכלי זין הרי כתב אח"ז בפי"ב ה"ב שרק מלחמת גוג ומגוג יהיה בתחלת ימות המשיח ששמע שאח"כ לא תהיה

עוד מלחמה בימות המשיח, ובקראי דיחזקאל לא הוזכר כי מלך המשיח וישראל ילחמו בכלי זין אלא השי"ת יהרגם בדבר ובדם וגשם ואבני אלגביש ואש וגופרית, והכלי זין שהביאו גוג ומגוג לא יקחום להיות אצלם לצורכי מלחמות אלא בערו בהם אש, הרי שלא יצטרכו ישראל לכלי זין בימות המשיח...

Regarding Rambam's opinion, even though he writes in the eleventh chapter of the Laws of Kings, halacha no. 4 that mashiach will fight the wars of Hashem, there is room to say that he will do so with weapons. Behold [Rambam] writes afterwards in the twelfth chapter, halacha no. 2 that only the war of Gog u-Magog will be at the beginning of the days of mashiach. This implies that afterwards, there will be no war during the days of mashiach. The verses in Yechezkeil don't mention that mashiach and the Jewish people will fight with weapons, but rather that Hashem will kill them with pestilence, blood, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone, and the weapons that Gog and Magog brought, they will not take for the purpose of war, rather they will get burned in fire. It seems that the Jewish people will not need weapons during the days of mashiach.

Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 4:81

10 Here, Rambam applies a principle he articulates elsewhere: debate reflects a lack of tradition. If the sages have many debates concerning the details of *mashiach*'s arrival, it is an indication that we do not have a tradition regarding these matters. Rambam discusses this concept in his introduction to his commentary on the Mishnah.

11 There are two ways to interpret "Yehei shemeih raba mevorch l-olam u-lolmei olmaya." *Machzor Vitri* (quoted by Tosafot, *Brachot* 3a and *Tur* O.C. 56) translates the phrase as, "May the name ש-י-ה is a contraction of (ש-י-ה) become whole (רבה) and blessed forever and ever." With this, we are alluding to the aforementioned statement of Chazal that God's name is not complete at present. Tosafot (*ibid.*) prefer to translate the phrase as: "May His great name (ש-י-ה) be blessed forever and ever."



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