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Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm zt"l on

Sukkot
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Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

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Table of Contents **Sukkot 5781**

A Tribute to Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm zt"l

Dedicated in memory of Bernice and Irby Cooper by their Loving Family

**Rabbi Lamm's
Drashot for
Sukkot**

**Sukkot and
Rabbi Lamm's
Legacy**

- 5 Indispensability: Myth and Fact**
- 8 Man is More than Sekakh**
- 11 Peace in Pieces**

- 14 R' Sam Dratch: The Halachot of the Sukkah and the Halichot of Rabbi Lamm**
- 18 Rabbi Dr. Stu Halpern: Simchat Torah, the Cain Mutiny, and Religious Responsibility**
- 21 Rabbi Mordechai Willig: Permanence and Transience (Keva and Arai):
Homes, Foods, Deeds and Worlds**



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REMEMBERING RABBI DR. NORMAN LAMM ZT"Л

The Yeshiva University community mourns the loss of Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm zt"l, the former president, Rosh HaYeshiva and chancellor of Yeshiva University. He was an elegant and articulate spokesman for Jewish life in modern times. His oratory, wisdom and leadership inspired our institution for more than three decades.

A prolific author in the field of Jewish philosophy and law, a distinguished academician and a charismatic pulpit rabbi, Dr. Lamm had an extraordinary impact on the Jewish community. With a rare combination of penetrating scholarship and eloquence of expression, he presented a view of contemporary Jewish life that spoke movingly to all.

He was elected Yeshiva University's third president in August 1976, succeeding Dr. Samuel Belkin (1943-1975) and Dr. Bernard Revel (1915-1940). He became the first native-born American to head the nation's oldest and most comprehensive Jewish institution of higher learning. He served as president until June 2003, during which time he also became Rosh HaYeshiva of the affiliated Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS). After retiring as president, he was elected chancellor, serving as both chancellor and Rosh HaYeshiva until July 2013, when he announced his retirement after being at Yeshiva University for more than 60 years.

"Rabbi Lamm was the premier expositor of our community's worldview. His teachings and writings anchored modern life in Torah values and taught us how we can grow from the interchange of history's great ideas. In his decades of leadership as our president, chancellor and Rosh HaYeshiva, he elevated Yeshiva University to new heights and educated thousands upon thousands of students who now serve as leaders of our community and pillars of our society. His enormous impact is simply incalculable in considering both the influence of his ideas as well as the number of alumni who graduated during his tenure from across our institution's graduate, undergraduate and rabbinic programs," said Dr. Ari Berman, President of Yeshiva University.

"As a visionary leader, sophisticated scholar, master orator and prolific writer, Rabbi Lamm

left an indelible mark on Jewish history and was a central architect of the modern Jewish experience. For my part, his loss is deeply personal, as he was a mentor and rebbe. He generously and lovingly gave me much of his precious time, sharing with me his Torah and wise counsel. Our community has lost a legend, and we mourn the passing of our teacher and guide."

He was born in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, New York, on December 19, 1927, to Pearl Baumol Lamm and Samuel Lamm. Dr. Lamm received his elementary and high school education at Yeshiva and Mesivta Torah Vodaath. In 1945, he entered Yeshiva College, where he majored in chemistry. Israel's War of Independence in 1948 tested his skills in the laboratory when, as a student, he was asked to work on a secret munitions project for the struggling state. The project was headed by Dr. Ernst D. Bergmann, who later became head of the Israel Atomic Energy Commission. He graduated summa cum laude in 1949 and was class valedictorian.

Upon graduation, Dr. Lamm pursued advanced scientific studies at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn, while continuing his Judaic studies and rabbinic scholarship. At the urging of Dr. Belkin to choose the rabbinate rather than science as his career, he was ordained as a rabbi at RIETS in 1951 and earned a PhD in Jewish philosophy from the University's Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies in 1966.

During the 17 years preceding his election as president, Dr. Lamm served on the Yeshiva University faculty, beginning in 1959 as an instructor in philosophy, culminating in his appointment as the Erna and Jakob Michael Professor of Jewish Philosophy in 1966. He also lectured at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, where he was a visiting professor of Judaic studies.

A pulpit rabbi for 25 years, he served as the spiritual leader of The Jewish Center in Manhattan. Prior to that, he served as assistant rabbi of New York City's Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun and then as rabbi of Congregation Kodimoh in Springfield, Massachusetts.

Dr. Lamm gained wide recognition for his writings and discourses on the interpretation



of Jewish philosophy and law, especially in relation to problems involving science, law, technology and philosophy in the modern world. He authored 10 books, including his major work, *Torah Lishmah* (1972), about the Mitnaggedim, and *The Religious Thought of Hasidism: Text and Commentary*, which won the coveted 1999 National Jewish Book Award in Jewish Thought. He also published many articles on Jewish law in many journals, one of which was cited in two separate landmark Supreme Court decisions on self-incrimination.

Dr. Lamm edited or co-edited more than 20 volumes, including *The Library of Jewish Law and Ethics*. He was the founder and first editor of *Tradition* and associate editor of *Hadarom*, a journal of Jewish law; founder of the *Torah U-Madda Journal*; and founder of the Orthodox Forum.

He was also active in many educational, religious and humanitarian endeavors, traveled extensively, served on many governmental commissions, and received numerous awards and honorary degrees.

Dr. Lamm is survived by his children, Dr. Chaye Lamm (David) Warburg, Dr. Joshua (Rivkie) Lamm and Shalom (Tina) Lamm; son-in-law Rabbi Mark Dratch, husband of Sara Lamm Dratch Z"l, who passed away on February 28, 2013; and his many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He is survived by his sisters, Tzivia Sittner and Miriam Auslander, and was the brother of Rabbi Dr. Maurice Lamm Z"l. His wife, Mindella (Mindy) Lamm Z"l, passed away on April 16, 2020.

This sermon was delivered by Rabbi Lamm at the Jewish Center in New York City on the second day of Sukkot 5724, October 4, 1963.



INDISPENSABILITY: MYTH AND FACT

Recently, I paid two calls upon two different individuals. One was a condolence call to a mourner sitting shivah. The other was a sick call to a patient in a hospital. By a remarkable coincidence, each of these told me of something he had learned from his experience, and the results were identical.

"From my experiences during this confinement, away from my normal activities," each of them told me, "I have discovered a marvelous truth. To my great relief, I now realize — that I am not indispensable. I had always thought that if I took time out, away from my business or practice, all of it would collapse hopelessly. Now I see that I have been away from my office, my business, my home; and while all might have benefitted somewhat by my presence, I might have done things

somewhat differently, nevertheless, my absence proved to be no disaster. It is both a welcome and a humbling thought: I am not as crucial to their survival as I thought I was! From now on, therefore, I shall give more time to my wife and my children, to discovering the wonders of the world about me, to attending to my synagogue, to developing my own mind and cultural level. I never realized I could do all these things and get away with it. Now I learned — and not only I but my family as well will be the beneficiaries of my discovery."

I believe all of us can appreciate the simple truth in these remarks. I submit to you, therefore, that the good Lord has given us an easier and more pleasant way to learn that truth than by suffering. He has given us the sukkah and the festival of Sukkot.

The essence of Sukkot is: *tzei mi-dirat keva ve'hikanes le'dirat arai*, leave your permanent home, and for seven days dwell in this temporary booth. Normally, the interpretation of the significance of this commandment points out the independence of man from his possessions. You need not have a fine home and expensive appointments in order to survive. Consider how for seven days you can get along without them. What you do need is G-d, the *tzila di'mehemanuta*, the shadow of faith. Your home is not indispensable to you. (Cf. Rashbam to Lev. 23:43, and S.R. Hirsch in *Horeb* vol. I, p. 124ff., Grunfeld trans.)

I prefer to interpret the meaning of Sukkot in the reverse direction, by emphasizing the converse: **You are not indispensable to your home, to your society!** When a man leaves

his *dirat keva*, his lavish home and complex society, and for seven days he moves out — whether completely, or at least partially, for meals — he discovers that they survive — even without his presence! By moving out from under a roof to under the *sekhakh*, he learns what the patient does in the hospital and the survivor in the house of mourning — except that he learns it through *simhah*, not anguish; that, in a great measure, the world can very well get along without him!

This is a sobering thought, for by destroying the myth of our indispensability, it makes us feel that we are not the center of the world, that we are essentially dependent beings. And it is also a liberating thought, for it assures us that we can now learn, throughout the year, to pay more attention to the things in life that are really important, and that we will not thereby be endangering the existence of the other, mundane affairs.

Perhaps, then, we ought to take a little bit of Sukkot with us through the rest of the year. Every day a waft of the Sukkah's atmosphere ought to inspire us to "let go" for a short while and divert our attention to ourselves, our minds, our hearts — our *neshamah*. The world can get along without us.

Bratzlaver Hasidim offer us a remarkable suggestion: every day ought to contain at least one "dead hour." All our waking hours are so filled with "life," with nervous tensions of all sort that afflict us in the course of our daily affairs in commerce, in business, in professions, in society. Our emotions are engaged with others, our feelings entangled with them, our sensitivities inflamed with real or imaginary slights to our pride, our minds overflowing with a myriad of details and plans,

worries and concerns on paying bills, satisfying employers or employees, pacifying clients or customers, meeting the competition, keeping up with the neighbors. These so-called "live" hours are so preoccupied with other people, that we utterly ignore our own selves. No wonder we have so little inner peace, inner tranquility. We are "alive" so tensely, so neurotically, so busily, that we head straight for the psychiatrist's couch and for spiritual oblivion. Hence, say the Bratzlaver Hasidim, keep one little hour set aside as your "dead hour." Make no appointments, answer no phone calls, read no newspapers, keep away from radio and television, see no people, write no memos to yourself. Be "dead to the world" — and alive to yourself. Banish all your usual problems from your mind. Think of where you are going in life — or, perhaps, where life is taking you; the difference is worth thinking about. Ponder your own conduct, and what it is doing to you and to your character and personality. Project into the future — that of yourself, your children, your community. Make a *heshbon ha-nefesh* with yourself that may help you redirect and reorient your day-to-day activities. And if you are not the contemplative kind — then pull your mind out of the sucking whirlpool of daily business and elevate yourself to a new and higher kind of existence by reading that which is enduring, reviewing the Sidra, finding inspiration to a higher-than-animal existence through art or music, studying a *blatt gemara* — dead to the world, and alive to yourself. One "dead hour" a day can make all of life worth living!

That ought to be one concrete, felicitous result of the message of Sukkot. For the Bratzlav's "dead hour" is the essence of Sukkot: you

can get away from under your *dirat keva*, from your normal routine, and into the *sukkah* under G-d's great heaven, without permanent damage to all the intricate goings-on in that home or office or factory, the *dirat keva*. But when we say that Sukkot teaches us that man is not indispensable, does that mean that he is expendable, that there is no area of life where he is indeed indispensable?

No, there are areas where man is crucial, where there can be only dismal failure without him. If in his mundane affairs, his *dirat keva*, his presence is dispensable; then in the *sukkah*, symbol of the spiritual world, man is indispensable! A *sukkah* without a Jew to make *kiddush* in it is meaningless. There is nothing holy about it. Strange as it may sound, in matters of the spirit **G-d needs man!** *Ha-Kadosh barukh Hu mitzapeh li'tefillatan shel tzaddikim*, G-d deeply desires the prayers of the righteous. His purposes in the world cannot be fulfilled without men — without each individual man or woman called upon by Him to contribute to the building of *malkhut shamayim*, the Kingdom of Heaven, the G-d approved society and world. If any one of us fails in his or her spiritual mission then, as our Sages were wont to say, G-d's Name is incomplete. Here — each of us is truly indispensable.

The Talmud (*Sukkah* 53a) tells us an interesting story of the renowned Hillel at the *simhat bet ha-shoevah*, the joyous celebration at the drawing of the waters which took place in the Temple on Sukkot. When Hillel would reach the heights of happiness at this occasion, he would say: *im ani kan, ha-kol kan; v'im eini kan, mi kan* — "if I am here, everyone is here; and if I am not here, who then is here?" A strange remark, is it not? Hillel the

humble, the gentle, the meek — is this sentiment worthy of him: I am indispensable? The Jerusalem Talmud, which understood the quotation to refer to Hillel himself, therefore rightly asks: *ve'khi le'kilusav Hu tzarikh*, does G-d need Hillel's praise and celebration that he should regard himself as so important? For the same reason, Rashi is moved to interpret the remark as being a quotation by Hillel of G-d, of the *Shekhinah*. Hillel, speaking in G-d's name, says: "If I am here, that is sufficient, for if I am not here, who is?" i.e. — nothing else counts. Yet this too is strange, for Hillel was a Sage, a Rabbi, and not a Prophet, and hence not given to speaking of G-d in the first person.

Even stranger is a sentence attributed to Hillel which follows immediately upon the one mentioned (cf. Rabinowitz, *Dikdukei Soferim*): *im ata tavo el beti, ani avo el betekha; v'im ata lo tavo el beti, ani lo avo el betekha*; if You, O G-d, will come to my home, I will come to Yours (i.e. the Temple); but if You will not come to my house, I will not come to Yours. What an astonishing expression! Is Hillel striking a bargain with G-d, making conditions about reciprocal hospitality with Him?

I believe that Hillel was guilty neither of arrogance in saying *im ani kan ha-kol kan*, nor of religious commercialism in saying *im ata tavo el beti*. What he meant was simply to teach what we have been saying: that man is **not** indispensable to the mundane world and its affairs, but **is** indispensable to the world of the spirit, of Torah, of Temple, of *Ha-Kadosh barukh Hu*. For this is what the great Hillel said: *im ani kan, ha-kol kan*, if I am here, in the *Bet Ha-Mikdash* in G-d's house; if I am here

at the festival of *simhat bet ha-shoevah*, drawing of the waters which Tradition has understood symbolically as the drawing of the Ruah ha-Kodesh, the holy spirit, from its divine source; when I am involved in the life of spirituality and sanctity; then if I am here all is well; but if I am not here, *im eini kan*, then *mi kan*, then I must feel that I am responsible for the fact that the holiness of the Temple is diminished, that the joy of the simhah and the whole spiritual enterprise is a failure — for here, in this House of G-d, I as a human am indispensable!

And then Hillel continues not in setting conditions in negotiations, but in stating an indisputable fact of spiritual life: *im ata tavo el beti*, when You come to my home, O G-d, when I understand that my home, my office, my factory, all my mundane affairs, all my successes and triumphs, all are *Your* doing, that is only because You are present does my home and career exist, that it is *You* Who has given me the intelligence and the substance, the health and the wealth, the confidence and the *mazal* to be what I am and have what I have, and that I am only ancillary and my presence and services can be dispensed with; when I realize that in *beti*, in my mundane life and the world You are indispensable and I am not; then it is equally true that *ani avo el betekha*, then I am important, nay indispensable, to the existence of Your house, the *Bet Ha-Mikdash*, the universe of the divine spirit. When a man has grown in spiritual maturity and understanding to appreciate his real place in the world, to acknowledge G-d as the cause of his success, then he is great enough spiritually to be crucial to the existence of G-d's house. When we know we need G-d, He knows that He needs us! However, *im ata lo tavo el*

beti, when I am so foolish that I give You no entree to my home, when I think I can get along without You and that it is I who is indispensable, that it is my wisdom and my shrewdness that have built my house and my career and my business, then *ani lo avo el betekha*, then I have no business in Your home, then You can get along very well without me. If man thinks he does not need G-d, then G-d knows He does not need man. The man who considers himself self-made and worships his maker, is ignored by G-d.

Here then is an invaluable lesson for us from Sukkot: into the *sukkah* for a week's time, enough to learn that the world can get along without you, but that G-d cannot.

Abolishing the myth of indispensability from our daily concerns will prevent us from entertaining exaggerated notions of self-importance, and will inspire us to plan those "dead hours" which can grace all of life with meaning, with serenity, with a touch of poetry. And affirming our indispensability to the spirit, to Torah, to the Synagogue, to Judaism, and to G-d's purposes, will give us a new insight into our true significance and our lofty place in the world.

Va-ani be-rav hasdekha avo betekha. Only when I realize that my whole life, my very self, my *ani*, my family and livelihood and joys and pleasures, all are the result of Your indispensable *hasadim*, Your kindness; only then *avo betekha*, do I have the right to enter Your House, Your Holy Temple, and only then may I be considered indispensable to its prevalence in the world.

This sermon was delivered by Rabbi Lamm at the Jewish Center in New York City on the second day of Sukkot 5733, September 24, 1972.



MAN IS MORE THAN SEKHAKH

Moral instruction is available to us Jews not only in the Humash, not only in Agadah and Midrash, but, sometimes, in Halakhah. If we look closely and carefully enough, we will discover the grand themes of human destiny even in legal technicalities, profound human wisdom even in halakhic discourses. All it requires is imagination, a sense of allegory, some homiletic license, and a readiness to find beautiful insights in unlikely places.

With this in mind, I commend your attention to the halakhic requirements of the *sekhakh*, the boughs and branches we use to cover the *sukkah*. The Halakhah lays down three conditions for the *sekhakh* to be kosher, or valid. The first of these is, that it must be *zomeah min ha-arez*: it must grow from the earth. Thus, it must be an item such as branches or wood, but not metal or plastic. Second, it must be *talush*, cut off from the ground. Hence, one may not build a *sukkah* underneath the overhanging branches of a tree, attempting to use those branches and leaves as *sekhakh*, for they are connected to the tree

which is connected to the earth. Third, the *sekhakh* must be *aino ra'uy le-kabel tumah*: it must be such that it cannot contract ritual defilement. According to the Halakhah, only such objects can become *tamei* (impure) that are artifacts, that have specific functions, such as vessels or pots or pans or ladders. For that reason one may not use for *sukkah* such items as ladders, grass mats, or wooden doors or frames, even though they are made of material that grows from the earth and is severed from the earth because, as functional objects, they can contract impurity.

Now, the *sukkah* symbolizes transience, impermanence, the weak and the feeble. It is the sparse and provisional roof of the wanderer's hut in the great desert. The three laws of *sekhakh*, therefore, are associated with mortality and finitude, with that which cannot survive.

But man is more than *sekhakh*! Man seeks permanence and endurance. All of life is, in a sense, the effort to overcome death. So much of life is a disguised attempt to achieve

immortality, whether in healthy ways or in sick ways, whether in the form of great contributions to scholarship and philanthropy, or simple social climbing and publicity seeking. We want to continue, to survive, to conquer the temporary and the ephemeral. Hence, to accomplish this, we must strive for the very opposite of the three laws of *sekhakh*. If, indeed, man is more than *sekhakh*, he must go beyond *arez*, *talush*, *aino ra'uy le-kabel tumah*.

Unlike *sekhakh*, man must transcend *arez*, earth, the symbol of purely material existence. Now, I am not arguing for the medieval notion that humans are caught in the vise of an enormous conflict between Matter and Spirit, and that they must choose Spirit and reject Matter. (That theme really goes back beyond the Middle Ages to ancient days, and the ancient movement known as Gnosticism.) It is not an idea I would recommend to moderns or to anyone. Judaism by no means considers this material world as all bad. But neither should we submit to the equally mistaken and even more disastrous idea that has seized us in modern days, that there is nothing

more to life and existence than this material world. This is a stifling and stultifying idea. It is based upon an immature skepticism that distorts the meaning of science when it insists in its name that only that is real which can be proved experimentally. We have been brainwashed with the theory that man is nothing more than an aggregate of molecules. For our contemporary materialism has indoctrinated us with a fallacious set of equations: that man equals animal, and animal equals machine, and machine equals chemicals, the kind that are found in the earth. Man, we are told to conclude, is exclusively a *zomeah min ha-arez*, nothing more than a product of the earth, with no additional dimensions to him.

However, if we are going to submit to this kind of scientific reductionism, we must go the whole way and ask: and what are chemicals made from?, and so on. And the answer would be: chemicals are atoms, and atoms are a form of congealed energy, and energy is, after all, simply an abstraction, a set of mathematical formulae. So, in a way, we have this terrifying pseudo-scientific conclusion: man is just a set of abstractions. Or, if you will: man is nothing! Not even *sekakh*!

A brief sermon is not a place to subject materialistic concepts to critical analyses. But it is important to note that the philosophy of man as *zomeah min ha-arez* is on the wane today. In Russia, the authorities are alarmed at the reemergence of signs of religious interest after six decades of state materialism and atheism. In the United States, where materialism is always officially disavowed, but where it is effectively the underpinning of "the American way of life," the younger generation is revolting against

the endless money — mania and possessions — obsessions of their elders and their cult of affluence. In Israel, the children of Kibbutzniks who exchange their Judaism for an idealistic Marxian materialism, are now rejecting materialism and searching for something deeper and higher; they are going beyond *arez* and looking for that which points to *shamayim*, to heaven. And social thinkers and philosophers of the first rank in the Western world, have developed a new interest in a respect for transcendence, for that which lies beyond immediate sense experience, beyond this world alone.

The second requirement of *sekakh* is that it be *talush*, severed from the ground, cut off from its origin. By the same token, if man is more than *sekakh*, then his redeeming quality must be that he remain *mehubar*, rooted and fixed in a framework of value and meaning, in a ground of *Weltanschauung*. For man to be human, he must recognize himself as a link in an ongoing chain, he must see himself as part of the continuum of human history. He must remember the legend on certain coupons and tickets: "No good if detached!"

Change there must be — but change in something, relative to something, out of something. One of the failures of the counter-culture, the "now generation," is its rootlessness. It is not based on and rooted in and attached to a past or a tradition. The counter-culture considers this a virtue, it holds itself free and liberated and emancipated because of its lack of connection to the past. But in truth it is as free as a piece of straw floating in the air; or, as David said of the *rasha* (evil man) in his first Psalm, *ke-moz asher tidsenu ha-ruah*, "like

chaff driven by the wind." Its rejection of the whole of the human past and inherited culture leaves it without any cultural equilibrium, without any psychological or spiritual rootage, and therefore incapable of making a creative contribution to human development. It is merely adrift. And instability is a symptom, not an ideal.

I remember a story (that is probably apocryphal, but nonetheless contains a great deal of truth) that was told shortly after the first session of the United Nations. According to this story, the delegation from Yemen was housed in a hotel, and after they left at the end of the session, the manager of the hotel discovered that all the faucets were missing. Upon investigation he discovered that these men of the desert were fascinated by these contraptions called faucets which, when turned on, magically allow water to emerge in full force. They therefore decided to take the faucets home with them to the desert, so that they can turn them on and thereby allow water to flow freely in the very desert.

What I am trying to say is that man, to be human, must be *mehubar* to a reservoir of culture and tradition and history, lest his currents of life run dry.

This is, after all, the sum and substance of what we mean by Jewish education. Jewish education contains such elements as learning Hebrew or learning Humash or learning the Talmud, and these are very important, but they are not the most significant object of Jewish education. Our central purpose is to give growing young Jews and Jewesses the feeling of a rootage in a great Jewish past, an awareness of being *mehubar* — connected to and growing out of — the greatness of Jewish history, so that even if they stray from the path they

will know what it is they are leaving, and they will recognize that to which they ought to return.

Finally, the third qualification for *sekhakh* is that it be *aino ra'uy le-kabel tumah* not capable of contracting impurity. Hence, by the criterion we have established, a man should be *ra'uy le-kabel tumah* capable of contracting impurity. I take this to mean that man must be ready to risk and dare in order to achieve and accomplish.

The Kabbalists have taught us that only that can achieve *kedushah* (sanctity) which can contract *tumah* (impurity). So, man himself is the main source of sanctification in the world; but when he loses his soul and returns it to his Creator, his body is a corpse which is considered halakhically *avi avot ha-tumah*, the most potent source of — defilement.

There is a powerful and dangerous idea on the loose here: that only by risking *tumah* can you achieve *kedushah*; that only by daring to lose can you win; that only by taking chances with failure can you succeed. The gambler's instinct can, of course, be taken to an extreme and turn into a disease. But without some element of hazard and risk, we are paralyzed and inert and can never make any progress.

The State of Israel would not be here today if those men meeting in Tel Aviv in 1948 at the session of the Vaad Leumi did not hazard monumental failure in declaring independence — as a fledgeling group without any experience in statecraft and any of the appurtenances of statehood. It was only because they were *ra'uy le-kabel tumah*, willing to embrace the possibilities of catastrophic failure, that Israel was created and became a *kiddush Hashem be-rabim*, a public and

historic sanctification of God's Name.

A leader — of any kind of group — must venture beyond the limits of caution and occasionally dare to speak out and declare his vision of the truth, even if he runs the risk of losing some of his followers. The alternative is to be a consensus leader, who merely does what the people want; but such a person is not a leader, merely an administrator. All progress, all change, involves the possibility of failure. But without it we are as good as dead. To be truly human, we must act responsibly — with equal emphasis on both: *act*, and *responsibly*. Young people are usually more active, frequently without a sense of responsibility. Middle aged and older people are most often responsible, but usually fail to act when they should. The wise person is both — active and responsible. And if man is more than *sekhakh*, he must be *ra'uy le-kabel tumah*, be ready to embrace defeat in order to try for victory, for triumph, for conquest.

So, there are times when we should strike out boldly. Think about it: the lesson of *sukkot* that man must be more than *sekhakh*, does not say that you should do things merely for the sake of novelty or to chase away boredom. But there are times when we want to do something which we think is right and proper, and we have assessed the possibilities of success and the possibilities of failure, the desirability of the former and the consequences of the latter, and logically we know we ought to take a chance. But we are frightened, we are apprehensive, we are too comfortable, we prefer our inertia. At such a time, *Sukkot* calls out to us and says: risk *tumah*, go ahead and innovate, experiment, make the move, go on aliyah, emigrate, change your

job, speak out, change your mind, do that which is new — and do not be afraid of failure, of risk, of danger, of criticism or derision! Take a chance!

The great achievement of man is to be *tahor* (pure) while he is *ra'uy le-kabel tumah* (capable of becoming impure).

These, then, are the three qualities that are requisite for man in order for him to be more than *sekhakh*, but to endure meaningfully. First, he must acknowledge more than material existence, more than *arez*, but be open to the transcendental and the spiritual. Second, he must be rooted in a great past and see himself as a link in the chain of history and culture and tradition. Third, he must be willing to be *ra'uy le-kabel tumah* that is, to venture and hazard and risk and dare.

That is how man can become more than *sekhakh*, more than the weak and feeble and temporary *sekhakh*. This is so according to the Rabbi of the Talmud who considered our *Sukkah* to be the physical counterpart of the huts that were used by our ancestors in the desert. But man becomes more like the *sukkah* according the opinion of another rabbi of the Talmud, who maintains that our *sukkot* are symbols not of the physical huts used in the desert, but of the *ananei ha-kavod*, the divine clouds of glory which protectively covered our ancestors during their entire peregrinations in the great desert.

In this sense, man becomes more like the *sukkah* and its *sekhakh*: by raising his head above the ground of materialism, by locating himself in a great past, by striving for greatness while willing to risk failure, he becomes worthy of being enveloped and covered by *ananei ha-kavod*, the clouds of glory.

This sermon was delivered by Rabbi Lamm at the Jewish Center in New York City on the second day of Sukkot 5734, October 12, 1973, less than a week after the breakout of the Yom Kippur War.



PEACE IN PIECES

In speaking on the theme "Peace in Pieces," I refer not only to the fragile peace in the Holy Land that has been so cruelly shattered this past Yom Kippur, but to a related idea that in some ways is untimely and in other ways most timely.

Perhaps the whole thing can be summarized in one statement of the Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah, Naso*) that:

גדול השלום, שאפילו בשעת מלחמה צריכין לשלום.

So great is peace, that even in time of war, one needs peace.

Even a little piece of peace is precious beyond words.

The late Rav Kook, of blessed memory, put it this way. In our prayers we ask *סוכת שלום* ופָרוֹשׁ עַלְנוּ, "spread over us the *sukkah* (tabernacle) of Thy peace." What is the relation between *sukkah* and *shalom*, between the booth or tabernacle which we build on this festival, and the concept of peace?

Rav Kook answers by pointing to the Halakhah, which did strange things with the commandment of *sukkah*. One would imagine that the observance is quite simple; one must build four walls, place over it the covering or *sekhakh*, and that is it. However, the Halakhah took a rather

different approach. It told us that even if there are no four walls, but only three, that is adequate. Even more: "three walls" does not mean three whole walls but a third wall, i.e., if the booth consisted only of two full walls and a small piece of a third wall, that too is sufficient. And then, by a series of legal fictions, and utilizing such abstract ideas as *lavud*, *gud ahit mehizta* and *dofen akumah*, it expanded the legal concept of *sukkah* by minimizing the requirements to the very core.

The conclusion that we derive from Halakhah is that even if one does not have a whole *sukkah*, but at least a

little piece of it, that too is good. So wonderful, so vital, so significant is the commandment of *sukkah*, that one must strive for whatever he can get of it.

So it is with peace, *shalom*. I do not know if the classical ideal of total and universal peace ever really existed. I believe it is more of a myth than a reality. One scholar calculated that from the year 1500 B.C.E. to the year 1860 C.E., there were no less than about 8,000 peace treaties that were signed, each one purporting to secure permanent peace, and each one lasting an average of two years (See H. B. Stevens, *The Recovery of Culture*, New York, 1949, p. 221). And that was before the two World Wars! I do not believe there is anyone alive today who can remember a time when universal peace prevailed. In all likelihood, we must resign ourselves to the bitter fact that this is a messianic ideal, one which will indeed not be realized until the Messiah has come. Nevertheless, so precious is peace, so great is peace, that — like the *sukkah* — even a little piece of peace is a blessing! Even *be-sha'at milhamah*, when the world is ravaged by war, we must seek the refuge of little islands of *shalom*, peace.

These bitter days, when even the illusion of peace has been shattered in the Holy Land, we must thank the Lord for the little pieces of peace, and strive our mightiest to retain them.

We must pray that even at the Israeli-Jordanian border, the uneasy peace will continue undisturbed, that the little King who had such a short memory in 1967 will remember more now, and, no matter what maneuvers he must undertake to satisfy his Arab critics, he will make sure that the border does not go up in flames.

We must pray that the friendship, peace, and understanding that currently prevails between Israel and the government of the United States will continue for a long time to come. So far the United States has proved to be a secure friend of Israel in this war. May the Almighty grant that this continue, that the superpower of which we are citizens remain steadfast and confront the enemies of Israel with determination.

Even more important is the *shalom* that prevails amongst Jews. Between 1967 and Yom Kippur of 1973, it seemed at times that the State of Israel and the Jewish people would be rent apart almost irrevocably by various struggles, factionalisms, and animosities. It is a pity that it takes a war to bring us together. But this time we must attempt to forge links of fraternity between Jew and Jew that will not fall apart when the pressures of the outside world begin to wane and ebb. This time we must resolve that we will remain secure with the feeling of powerful Jewish identity, fraternity, and brotherliness, come what may. This time we must insist that the relations between Jew and Jew remain supreme even when we are not threatened by the missiles of the enemy.

Perhaps most important of all is the peace between God and Israel. We must pray for *shalom bein Yisrael la-Avihem she-ba-Shamayim*, that we will be at peace with our Father in Heaven. I mean this in two ways. First, our attitude to God. We were spoiled by the Six-Day War of 1967. We won a lightning victory that stunned everyone — even the generals, who later on knowingly and foolishly bragged that they knew all along we would win a stunning victory. The fortunate trauma of total triumph did

something to the Jewish soul; it shook up Jews in Israel and throughout the world, it penetrated beneath the hardened layers of Sabra cynicism and realism, and allowed some kind of spark, some kind of historical longing, some kind of spiritual nostalgia to express itself without self-consciousness and embarrassment. What a great opportunity that was for Israel to take a giant step forward spiritually! But it was not to be, whether the fault was that of religious Jews (which it probably was) or of the inexorable pace of routine life which was quickly resumed. What is quickly won, is quickly lost. A year after the 1967 war, there was hardly a souvenir left of the feeling of spiritual exaltation which so gripped the entire country. The religious renaissance simply never materialized.

Perhaps now it will be different. Most unfortunately, this is not going to be a mere 6-day war. It is going to be much more difficult. The casualties are already greater than they were in the entire 1967 war. But when it is over, and we will have prevailed (with the help of God), maybe then the slower pace of victory will produce a different attitude: not one of sudden seizures of religious insight which will, like a flash, illuminate and vanish quickly, but a slow understanding, a mature development, a profound realization that we are totally alone in the so-called "Family of Nations"; that in the long run, after we have relied upon each other as Jews, and after we have secured ourselves militarily and politically, ultimately *אין לנו להשען אלא על אבינו שבسمים*, we have only God in Whom we can trust, and with Whom we must make peace first and foremost. In the Jewish religious conception, every great event in one's life, and every great historical

event in the life of people, must lead to a *hirhur teshuvah*, to a feeling of repentance, to a reconsideration of one's way, to a change in one's spiritual orientation. I firmly believe that we were not created and brought through the entire historical process, with all its agonies, in order to be a small embattled nation which will have to fight for its very existence every few years. We were meant for greater things, for achievements that will have made all this struggle worthwhile. We were destined for something for which nationhood and independence are prerequisite, but which transcend mere political entity. So we must determine that when this war is done, it will lead to a greater feeling of *shalom* between Israel and its Creator.

But there is another side to this coin. And that is the *shalom* or peace by God towards Israel. Because 1967 produced such a brilliant and quick victory, many of us are today depressed by the slower and more agonizing pace of events. But I would not like to see despair as the only alternative to the exaltation of triumph. No, we must not, we dare not despair. It simply cannot be that we are finished as a state or as a people. For a brief few years in our living memory, God abandoned us. He turned His face from us, and we were almost wiped out. But immediately thereafter, from 1948 and on, something else happened in the relationship between God and Israel. He restored us to — if you permit me the use of the term — a Most Favored Nation Status in the

divine economy. It is a status to which we have been recalled and which is irrevocable. We can no longer afford to be abandoned. We must proceed throughout the remainder of this war and its aftermath confident in the faith that the Almighty will never again forsake us, that we shall remain the people through whom He will execute His designs for History, the People who, having been brought back to its ancient homeland, will continue to vindicate the historic promise to our forefather, Abraham.

So we strive for peace even in pieces. Every bit of it, every piece of peace, every iota of *shalom*, is precious to us.

**When it comes to peace,
there we cannot expect
all at once. There we
must try for even a letter,
even a vowel, even a
syllable. We must strive
even for peace in pieces.**

Rav Kook continues with the following insight: the Rabbis of the Talmud made two statements that are fascinating. In one (Shab. 10b), they say *שָׁלוֹם שֶׁל הַקָּבָ"ה*, the name of the Holy One is: "Peace." In the other one (Shab. 55a) they say: *חֲותָמוּ שֶׁל הַקָּבָ"ה אֶתְמָתָה*, the seal of the Holy One is: "Truth." So the name of God is

Peace, and the seal of God is Truth. What is the difference between these terms?

Rav Kook answers: a name is something that is both written and pronounced consecutively or sequentially. First you write one letter, then the next letter, and so on. Similarly, in articulating a name, you pronounce first one syllable, then the next. When you imprint a seal, however, then you do it not sequentially, but simultaneously. You engrave the seal on the paper and all of it comes out at once. Truth is a seal. It must be all or nothing. A piece of truth is a lie. A fragmented truth is a falsehood. But when it comes to peace, there we cannot expect all at once. There we must try for even a letter, even a vowel, even a syllable. We must strive even for peace in pieces.

Almighty God, spread over us the *sukkah* of *shalom*, over us and all Israel and Jerusalem. Like the *sukkah*, we are anxious for as much as we can get of the divine blessing of peace. Even little pieces of it are gifts that we cherish infinitely.

But with all this, we pray — as we do in the *Hoshanot* prayers — סוכת שלם והשענו, help us and prosper us with the *sukkah* that will be *shalem* — complete, a peace that will be inviolate, and universal as well.



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<https://www.yutorah.org/rabbi-norman-lamm>



THE HALACHOT OF THE SUKKAH AND THE HALICHOT OF RABBI LAMM

In the months since my Zeida, Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, passed, he has been spoken about and remembered in many different ways: as a president, a rabbi, a *darshan*, a father and grandfather. The tributes have been beautiful, informative, and deeply meaningful. There is one lens, however, through which I have not seen him viewed. This is the lens of Rabbi Lamm as a sukkah. This is not a surprise. Rabbi Lamm passed away after Shavuot and his actual roles serve as a more obvious frame of reference to speak about him. But being the unrepentant *darshan* that he was, I

don't believe he would be too upset about being remembered in this less straightforward way. More specifically, and to borrow and paraphrase the *kri u'ktiv* that titles Rabbi Lamm's halacha sefer, I intend to use the *halachot* (laws) of sukkah to recount the *halichot* (ways) of this great man. The sukkah's structure ideally has walls that reach all the way up to kosher schach, with the schach completely covering the sukkah with gaps only wide enough to see stars, and with no large spaces. When the sukkah seems to fall short of these requirements, under certain

parameters, halachah provides models to redefine how to view the dimensions. These models allow us to view the reality of halacha, rather than the reality that we perceive.

For example, when there is a noticeable gap in the schach that is smaller than three *tefachim*, halachah provides the model of *lavud*, establishing that, in (halachic) reality, the gap is not there and to sit under the gap would be equivalent to sitting under schach. Another model that halachah provides is that of *dofen akumah*. *Dofen akumah* is the principle that if there are four *amot*

or less of invalid schach or any other covering (such as an overhang), and that covering runs from the wall to the kosher schach, that covering is considered an extension of the wall and does not invalidate the sukkah. Finally, the principle of *gud asik* is utilized in the sukkah as well. *Gud asik*, as applied to a sukkah, means that even if a wall at least ten *tefachim* high does not extend up to the schach, halacha considers the wall as if it continues upward to meet the schach. In his life, Rabbi Lamm, through his actions, words, and vision, made use of these halachic tools.

Rabbi Lamm used *dofen akumah*, both in his ideology and in how he cared for people. *Dofen akumah*, in the Ritva's view (*Sukkah* 4), is a halachah insisting that walls separated from kosher schach by *pasul* schach actually bend toward the center to meet the kosher schach. In his writings and lectures, Rabbi Lamm consistently and wholeheartedly maintained his belief in centrism as the Jewish ideal. To him, the walls of Judaism pointed toward the center. This is most classically typified by his desire to have Modern Orthodoxy be referred to as Centrist Orthodoxy, and was often expressed in his complete disdain for extremism. One of the most common sources that comes up in Rabbi Lamm's drashas is the Rambam's formulation of the golden mean, the ultimate call toward centrism and moderation. However, this did not amount to a retreat to halfhearted beliefs, or an apologetic and pandering spiritual demeanor. Anyone who has read a word of his writings or has heard a line of his drush can attest to his complete and utter belief in the authenticity and importance of what he believed the Torah to be saying. Seeing him in his

home learning or sitting next to him davening at shul was, for me, the very picture of a life lived in dedication to Hashem and the *Mesorah*. His centrism and moderation was not a call to being moderately passionate, but, as he put it, to being passionately moderate.

Rashi's view (*Sukkah* 4a, 17a), as we have it, seems to be different from the Ritva's regarding *dofen akumah*. Rashi holds that *dofen akumah* is not an invisible slanting of the walls toward the schach in the center; instead, Rashi holds that the walls actually bend over completely at a right angle to continue via the invalid schach. In this way, Rabbi Lamm embodied the walls of the sukkah. I knew this when he was alive, but even more so now that I hear the many stories about him since his passing; Rabbi Lamm consistently and astonishingly bent over completely to help others. I was told by my uncles and aunts that the nearly default shiva visit after Rabbi Lamm's passing was, "I reached out to your father in a time of crisis, he moved mountains for me, and we stayed in correspondence for years." The flood of examples has not stopped. People who were children when Rabbi Lamm influenced and helped them; immigrants, potential *agunot*, people facing poverty, and everyone in between have shared their stories of Rabbi Lamm bending over backwards for them. But what for me makes his acts of chesed and caring even more meaningful is that Rabbi Lamm was able to do it all while constantly writing, reading, running a shul, and later and most impressively in terms of giving of himself, acting as President of Yeshiva University.

Rabbi Lamm made use of *lavud* in his role as a grandfather. There are

many reasons for a grandparent to feel separate or distant from his grandchildren. There are often differences in interests, barriers of common language, or the natural obstacles of relatability that come with decades of separation in age. In Rabbi Lamm's case, there were far more reasons for any gap in connection. He was an impossibly busy man, a towering intellectual, and someone esteemed by others in a way we children could not understand. But just as halacha demands we see no gap in the schach, Rabbi Lamm always made a conscious effort for us to feel there was absolutely no gap between us, his grandchildren and him. He did this by bridging that gap himself. As children, whenever we entered his home we were greeted, not with a hello, but with humor and an offer to pull his beard. He let us know right from the start we were here to see Grandma and Zeida, not Rabbi Dr. President and Mrs. Norman Lamm. Growing up, my grandfather sent doodles and drawings to us, knowing this was something of his we could appreciate and hold on to. He stretched from his end, to reach us where we were, the gap vanishing.

Not only would he purposely let down his guard and give us attention we could appreciate, but he would make us feel we were bridging the gap in our own right. He was generous with sharing that he was proud. Any dvar Torah or question we had would be met with praise and encouragement. I recall, as a child of 10 or 11, that when I first heard of *Torah U'Madda*, I had a burning question. A question that, in my expert opinion as a 6th grader, would disrupt and disband the entire project of Modern Orthodoxy. My father said, "we have to ask Zeida!" So the next time we were with him

for Shabbos, my father pushed me to bring up the question. Sheepishly, because I felt embarrassed that I was going to ruin Rabbi Lamm's philosophy, I asked, "Zeida, if you believe we have to care about Torah and Madda equally, what would happen if you ran into a burning building and saw both a Torah and an encyclopedia, but you could only save one? Wouldn't you have to choose!?" Despite my misunderstanding of Torah U'Madda and my ignorance of what halacha would have to say about the matter, Rabbi Lamm feigned intense thought. He furrowed his brow and brought his hand to his chin and said, convincingly, "That's an excellent question." I felt like a million dollars. He continued, "I would save the sefer Torah. What you have to understand is that you could care deeply about two different things while not always only giving attention to one. You don't always have to choose between your wife and your mother." The reason I remember this encounter and many others like them so clearly, is because they meant for me, not only that the gap could be bridged by him sharing cartoons and jokes and coming to us, but that he

wanted us to come to him as well, and to believe that we could. This effort of a nurturing *lavud*, of not letting any of the potential gaps in relationship come to fruition, defines for me his role as a grandfather.

The final halachic tool that Rabbi Lamm embodied in his life was *gud asik*. To me, this is the most defining of his character and vision. To the cynic, a wall only ten *tefachim* high stops where his perception of it ends. It grows no taller and has no more significance. To the halachist, there is much more to the wall than meets the eye. It rises higher than the perceivable ten *tefachim*. The eyes of the halachist in the sukkah, to see the wall reaching greater heights than one might think, was how Rabbi Lamm viewed people and the world in general.

When it came to people, he saw not the modest heights that people reached; he looked up and saw their potential. When reading the drashas he gave at the Jewish Center this is particularly obvious. Rabbi Lamm would push the bar higher and higher. Speaking directly against apathy and settling for less, Rabbi Lamm would

aim, not to entertain, but to change perspectives. He didn't quote simple sources or rely on cliche ideas to gain popularity and acceptance. Despite making his ideas understandable and accessible, he also challenged the listener with sophistication, intellectual honesty, and unwavering ideals and goals. He saw where his congregation could be, not where they were. Personally, I felt his vision of *gud asik* in my life as well. I spent my childhood much more concerned with hockey than Rav Chaim, to say the least. Despite this, he always introduced me in the following way: "This is my grandson, Sam. He's a sports player now but he's going to be a talmid chacham one day." I'm not sure if he knew how utterly meaningful this introduction was. I wasn't planning on putting down the hockey stick at those moments, but I knew that Rabbi Lamm believed in me. I knew that he wanted me to see myself the way he could envision me. Although I have not yet accomplished this goal of becoming a talmid chacham, his *gud asik* vision keeps the goal to rise to his vision a constant.

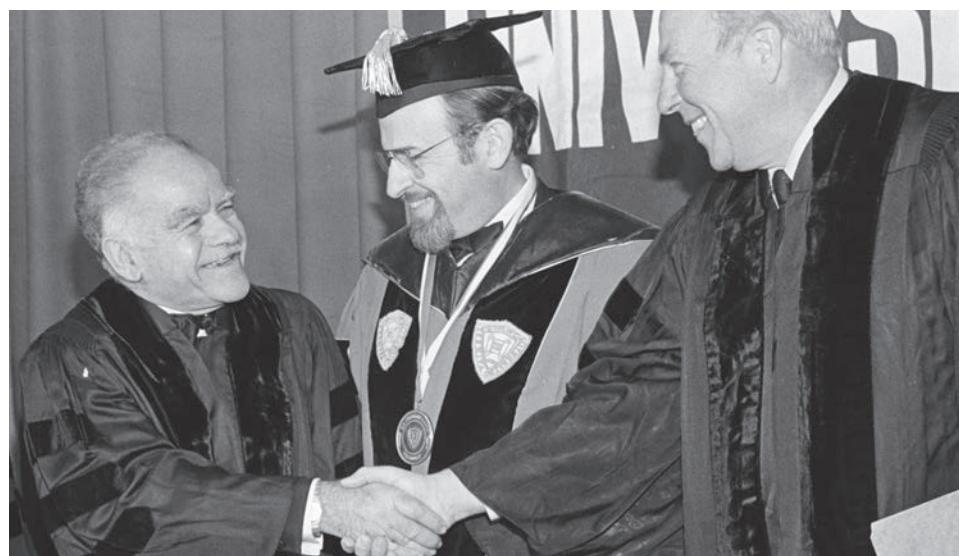
The *halachot* of the sukkah relate

The eyes of the halachist in the sukkah, to see the wall reaching greater heights than one might think, was how Rabbi Lamm viewed people and the world in general.



to specific *halichot* of Rabbi Lamm, but that is not where the comparison ends. At first glance, and understandably so, the sukkah represents a sense of impermanence and transience. It is a structure that only needs to last for seven days, whose ceiling is perforated, and whose walls don't need to provide tremendous shelter. Halacha even recognizes the impermanent nature of the sukkah by not requiring a mezuzah to be placed on its doorpost (*Shulchan Aruch*, YD 286:11). The message is often shared that we are to learn that despite the impermanence of the sukkah, we can still find meaning and happiness in it.

However, I believe that there is another, differing message we can learn when looking at the context of how our sources talk about the sukkah. The first source that we deal with when discussing sukkah is its source from the Torah. In Vayikra, 23:42, we are given the normative commandment to sit in sukkot. Then, in Vayikra 23:43, we are told that we must do so "in order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt." At this point, we encounter the structure of the sukkah at two points in time. First, the expectation that any Jew living in the present (whenever that may be) must erect a sukkah. Then, the Torah informs us that doing so should hearken us back to the ancient sukkot of the Israelites after they left Egypt. That's not all, though. The sukkah is also meant to occupy our vision of the future. The Gemara, in *Baba Batra* 75a, describes the sukkah of *le'atid lavo* (future days) as one that Hashem makes for the righteous from the skin of the



Leviathan. This meal, and sitting in the sukkah specifically here, is meant as an ultimate future reward for a life of righteousness.

The sukkah structure capturing the space of our past, present, and future places it not as a symbol of the temporal which can be overcome, but as a symbol of what is truly lasting. The sukkah's place as formed in the past, lived in the present, and yearned for in the future makes it, as a structure, more established and everlasting than any modern skyscraper whose history is a matter of trivia, and whose future is dependent on practical use. The sukkah shows that overcoming transience, and ensuring its place in the future, is a matter of transcendence to a higher ideal. There are then two attempts at becoming everlasting. One where the attempt is a matter of literally eternally present, and the other is being eternally meaningful. The sukkah, although there is no attempt to be physically everpresent, and thus no mezuzah is to be placed on its doorpost, is eternal in its meaning.

When it comes to people, there is no possibility of being physically ever

present. We are here one day and gone the next. Our life in this world, like in the sukkah, is a *diras aray* — a temporary structure. However, when a life is lived meaningfully, with ideals and contributions of transcendent value, the individual living that life becomes like a sukkah in a different way, and they become everlasting.

Rabbi Lamm, in that way, is a sukkah. His contributions of transcendent value ensure he is still present. The books he left over offer, in the present, an open conversation with him. A conversation where he guides through inspiration, scholarship, mussar, and love, not just his grandchildren, but anyone who opens them looking for meaning. The blood, sweat, and tears given to Yeshiva University and everything it stands for in the world is a contribution that makes him present in the present and, G-d willing, in the future of the Jewish people. Possibly most significantly, he is ever present in the lives of the countless people for whom he bent over backwards, brought to their full potential, and gave a roadmap in a plethora of ways for what it means to be a thinking, inspired, and caring Jew.



SIMCHAT TORAH, THE CAIN MUTINY, AND RELIGIOUS RESPONSIBILITY

Simchat Torah is a celebration of the world's largest book club. Jews across the globe unite in joyfully commemorating completion of the yearly Torah-reading cycle and starting it again. Though the current pandemic has unfortunately precluded a regular completion of the cycle and the usual festivities will also be curbed, we nonetheless unhesitatingly begin reading our holy Torah again.

As we reread of God's creation of the

world and the creation of the first man and woman, we might consider, amid our current socially distanced moment, how lonely, isolated, and precarious Adam and Eve must have felt in navigating a new world. And, as we proceed to read *Parashat Bereshit*, we come across a heroic and inspiring act of one of the earliest humans, a moving gesture amid uncertainty. Cain brings a sacrifice.

(ג) וַיְהִי מֵקֶץ יָמִים וַיִּבְאֶרְכֵן מִפְרֵי הָאָדָם

מןחה לה': (ד) וַיַּבְלֹל הַבְּיאָגָם הוּא מִבְכָרָת צָאנוֹ וּמִתְלַבְּרוֹן וְשַׁעַר ה' אֶל הַבָּל וְאֶל מִזְבְּחָת: (ה) וְאֶל קַיּוֹן וְאֶל מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא שָׁעָה וַיַּחֲרַל קָיוֹן מָאָד וַיַּפְלֹל פָּנָיו:

In the course of time, Cain brought an offering to the Lord from the fruit of the soil and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock. The Lord paid heed to Abel and his offering, but to Cain and his offering He paid no heed. Cain was much distressed and his face fell.

Cain, we recall, was so named by his mother, because, as she said, “I created (*kaniti*) a male child with the Lord.” Blessing God for the fruit of her womb, Eve thanked God for His help in allowing the child to be born. And so, as Jonathan Grossman notes in his *Creation: The Story of Beginnings* (YU Press and Maggid Books, 2019), her son, after growing up, follows suit. Cain too has produced fruit, this time of the agricultural variety, and, just like his mother, thanks God for what has flowered. And he did so while fulfilling his parents’ mission, having been commanded to work the ground and toil in it. As a means of thanking God, he innovates the central ancient religious ritual, a practice that inspired our own daily prayers. He brought a *korban*.

At this stage, Cain seems poised to be a religious hero. Clearly the focal point of the narrative (his brother Abel’s name, unlike his own, was given no explanation), he movingly offers to God a sign of gratitude. As Moshe Halbertal has written, “The gift of sacrifice to God, who is in the first place the provider of the good and in no need of it, functions as a token of submission and gratitude.”

But Cain’s act is met with brutal disappointment. God, for reasons unexplained, does not accept Cain’s sacrifice. But Abel’s is accepted. “Religious sacrifice is a costly act of self-giving, in denial of natural inclinations, that is offered in suspense, under conditions that threaten failure, for the purpose of establishing a relation with the transcendent reality” writes scholar David L. Weddle. And Cain’s sacrifice failed.

(ז) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֲלֵיכָן לְמִהְרָה לְךָ וְלִפְמָה נִפְלָאוּ פְנֵיךְ: (ז) הַלֹּא אַם תִּשְׁיבֵ שָׂאת וְאַם לֹא תִשְׁיבֵ לְפִתְחַ חֶטְאת רֶבֶץ וְאַלְכֵךְ תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשַׁל בָּזָה:

And the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you distressed, And why is your face fallen? Surely, if you do right, There is uplift. But if you do not do right, Sin crouches at the door; Its urge is toward you, Yet you can be its master.”

Following the sacrifices, Cain is the one God addresses, not Abel, whose offering had been received. God is invested in Cain’s potential, encouraging continued efforts at goodness despite disappointment and unrequited entreaties. But then things go south. History’s first religious hero becomes mankind’s first villain. Cain murders his brother.

Cain’s decision to be not his brother’s keeper, but his destroyer, amid what was surely anger and disappointment, receives, later in Sefer Bereshit, a comforting and restorative echo.

In a tale with literary and thematic parallels to the first sibling rivalry and fraught jealous rivalry, Joseph is sold by his brothers into slavery.

Like with Cain and Abel, rulership is at stake:

Joseph & His Brothers	Cain and Abel
בראשית פרק ל'	בראשית פרק ז'
<p>(ח) וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֱלֹהִים הַמֶּלֶךְ עַלְיוֹנוֹ אַם מִשְׁׁלַט תִּמְשַׁל בָּנָנוּ וַיֹּסֶף עוֹד שָׁנָא אֶתְהוּ עַל חַלְמָתְךָ וְעַל קְבָרְיוֹ:</p> <p>His brothers answered, “Do you mean to reign over us? Do you mean to rule over us?” And they hated him even more for his talk about his dreams.</p>	<p>(ז) הַלֹּא אַם תִּשְׁיבֵ שָׂאת וְאַם לֹא תִשְׁיבֵ לְפִתְחַ חֶטְאת רֶבֶץ וְאַלְכֵךְ תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשַׁל בָּזָה:</p> <p>Surely, if you do right, There is uplift. But if you do not do right, Sin crouches at the door; Its urge is toward you, Yet you can be its master.”</p>

There is the seeking of brothers:

<p>(ט) וַיֹּאמֶר אֶת אֲחֵי אַנְבֵּי מִבְּקָשׁ הַגִּידָה נָא לִי אִיפָּה הַמְּרֻעָם:</p> <p>He answered, “I am looking for my brothers. Could you tell me where they are pasturing?”</p>	<p>(ט) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֲלֵיכָן אֵי הַבָּל אֲחֵיךְ וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי הַשְׁמֵר אֲחֵי אַנְבֵּי:</p> <p>The Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” And he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?”</p>
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Isolation in fields holds the possibility of danger:

<p>(טו) וַיָּמֹצֵא הָאִישׁ וְהַנֵּה תְּשַׁעַ בְּשָׂרוֹ וַיֹּשִׁאֵל הָאִישׁ לְאָמֵר מָה תִּבְקֹשׁ:</p> <p>A man came upon him wandering in the fields. The man asked him, “What are you looking for?”</p>	<p>(ח) וַיֹּאמֶר קַיּוֹן אֶל הַבָּל אֲחֵיו וַיֹּהֵי בְּהִזּוּם בְּשָׂדָה וַיָּקֹם קַיּוֹ אֶל הַבָּל אֲחֵיו וַיַּהֲגֹגֵן:</p> <p>Cain said to his brother Abel ... and when they were in the field, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him.</p>
<p>(כ) וְעַתָּה לְכָוֹן וְנַהֲרֹגֵהוּ וְנִשְׁלַחְכָּהוּ בְּאַחֲרֵינוּ הַבְּרוֹתָה וְאִמְרָנוּ כִּי רָעָה אָכַלְתָּהוּ וְנִרְאָה מַה יִהְיֶה חַלְמָתְךָ:</p> <p>“Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we can say, ‘A savage beast devoured him.’ We shall see what comes of his dreams!”</p>	

And the blood of brothers stands to be spilled:

(כו) ויאמר יהוקה אל אחיו מוה בצע פי
נָהָרֶג אַת אֲחִינוּ וְבָשַׂרְנוּ אֹתְךָ מִן: (כז)
לְכָיו גַּנְמְכַרְנוּ לִשְׁמָעוֹת וַיַּדְנוּ אֶל תְּהִי
בָּו פִּי אֲחִינוּ בְּשָׁרָנוּ הֵוָא וִישְׁמַעְנוּ אֲחִיכָּו:

Then Judah said to his brothers, "What do we gain by killing our brother and covering up his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, but let us not do away with him ourselves. After all, he is our brother, our own flesh." His brothers agreed.

(יא) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל אָדָם מִן הָאָדָם כִּי לְקַחְתָּ אֶת דָּמֵי
אָחִיךְ מִזְדָּקָה:

Therefore, you shall be more cursed than the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

Their familial future is assured.

As we, on Simchat Torah, begin Bereshit anew in the context of our own societal, financial and communal precariousness, the stories of Cain and Abel, and Joseph and his brothers, remind us of the stabilizing force of individual responsibility. Kindness toward another, now as then, can be the antidote to despair, anger, doubt, and uncertainty.

In a sermon delivered in 1955, Rabbi Norman Lamm, my wife's grandfather, spoke of the true nature of holiness. It, he said, "is for those whose hands must come to grip with real situations cold, brutal, unattractive, unfeeling; and who can wrest from them cleanliness, warmth, pleasantness, kindness." As we begin once again reading the holiest of books, amid a dark and disappointingly long period of instability, we are reminded how religious heroism, and our societal future, relies on our ability to bring kindness and light to our brethren.

A Tribute to Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm zt"l

by RIETS Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

On Yom Kippur Night of 1964, Rabbi Norman Lamm, zt"l, spoke of what he called "the Royal Reach." He described the need to always aspire to a level greater than one's current stature, quoting the poet Robert Browning: "a man's reach should exceed his grasp". In this premise, it is appropriate and necessary for one to deliberately set a standard for himself that is beyond what he can currently attain.

With this perspective, maybe there is some understanding that can be brought to the placing of Kol Nidre at the opening of Yom Kippur. Yes, we are declaring, it is true that we have failed to live up to the commitments we have made in the past year. However, there is a good reason for that: we had, as we were supposed to, set very lofty goals, that by design were beyond our grasp.

In fact, if we had accomplished everything we had set out for ourselves in this past year, that would be the real embarrassment: we would have had aimed too low. The fact that our aspirations have been beyond our capacities is actually an argument on behalf of our repentance and our potential for the future. And, yes, we can proudly say

as well, that we expect to be here again next year once again asking for release from our obligations. Anything less than that would be an inexcusable failure of religious ambition. Kol Nidre is about proudly acknowledging we set our sights too high, as we should, and if we are granted life, we will do it again next year.

As we turn from Yom Kippur to Sukkos, we see a glimpse of how our expanded religious ambition could manifest. Sukkos is often understood in the mussar literature to represent *teshuva me'ahavah*, repentance from love, the growth of active spiritual fulfillment rather than merely the abandonment of harmful patterns of the past for which Yom Kippur atones. With its multitude of mitzvos, Sukkos displays the boundless opportunity open to the religious idealist.

It is a most fitting symbol of the picture that was painted for us by our great leader Rabbi Lamm, who through his teachings, writings, and most powerfully, his personal model, made us understand that a world of possibility existed to realize the aspirations of the committed seeker, and that the royal reach could be within our grasp.



PERMANENCE AND TRANSIENCE (KEVA AND ARAI): HOMES, FOODS, DEEDS AND WORLDS

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

In Sukkos you shall dwell for seven days, every citizen (Ezrach) in Yisrael should sit in sukkos (Vayikra 23:42). The Torah said: All seven days, leave your fixed dwelling (diras keva) and sit in a temporary dwelling (diras arai)
Sukka 2a

The Kli Yakar translates *ezrach* as *toshav*, a permanent resident. At the time of harvest, on Sukkos, everyone wants to live in his house, a *yeshivas keva*. The Torah instructs one who wishes to be a permanent resident of this world and not a *ger*, a sojourner, to leave his fixed dwelling for a temporary one.

He will thereby recognize that he is merely passing through this world (as in *Rosh Hashana* 9b) on the way to the next, permanent world.

A wealthy American visited the Chafetz Chaim in Radin. He offered to buy him a new home and new furniture that befits the *gadol hador*. The Chafetz Chaim replied: "During your sojourn in and near Radin, despite your wealth, you also are living in very modest quarters." The rich man responded: "In my permanent residence in America I have a beautiful home and furnishings. Here, I am merely passing through." The Chafetz Chaim concluded: "I have no need for a new home or furniture in this world. I am only passing through."

This is the lesson of Sukkos. We dwell in a sukka to recognize that our successes and our lives in this world are only temporary, *arai*, and not *keva*.

Arai and Keva in the Laws of Sukkah

We may eat and drink lightly (*arai*) outside the sukka (*Sukka* 25a). How much is light eating? Rav Yosef said (bread the size of) two or three eggs. Abaye asked, Often that is enough to satisfy a person, and it constitutes a regular meal (*keva*). Rather, Abaye said, as a yeshiva student tastes before going into the shiur (26a). Rashi (27a) explains that it is the size of an egg. Any more than an egg is a regular

meal and must be eaten in the sukka (O.C. 639:2). It's a totally quantitative *shuir* of bread.

The Rambam (*Sukka* 6:6) exempts light eating, the size of an egg or a bit less or more. It is not a purely quantitative *shuir*. One is exempt if it is not viewed as a meal, but rather a snack to abate his desire to eat until subsequent mealtime (Commentary to Chap. 2 Mishna 7, see Bartenura). A bit more than an egg means up to the *shuir* of two eggs of Rav Yosef.

Why does Rav Yosef say two or three? If the size of three eggs is exempt, then certainly the size of two eggs is exempt! Perhaps the answer is that three eggs is a known quantity for a meal (Rambam *Eruvin* 1:9, see M.B. 168:24). Three eggs is a meal for most people, and up to that amount is exempt. But some establish a meal on as little as the size of two eggs. For them, more than two eggs must be eaten in the sukkah.

However, the halacha follows Abaye, not Rav Yosef. According to Abaye and the Rambam, one egg or less is halachically light. From one to two is light if eaten as a snack and not as a meal. More than two is halachically a meal. However, according to the *Shulcahn Aruch*, any bread larger than the size of one egg must be eaten in the sukkah.

What about other foods? The *Shulchan Aruch* (639:2) exempts fruit and wine. The *Mishna B'rura* (13) includes meat, fish, and cheese in this exemption, since the *Shulchan Aruch* rules that only a cooked item made



from grain, if it is eaten as a meal, must be eaten in the sukka. A bit more than the size of an egg is exempt, as opposed to bread (*Mishna B'rura* 15). While some disagree, we do not recite "*leshev basukka*," since he is likely exempt.

Despite that, the *Mishna B'rura* (16) records the custom to recite *leshev basukka* on a bit more than the size of an egg of cake, since it is similar to bread. This is questionable. The Rosh (2:13) exempts meat and cheese since it is not common to establish a meal on them. Today, however, many people avoid bread and eat meat or cheese as the main part of the meal, and the exemption may not apply. By contrast, cake is considered a snack and *leishev basukka* is questionable.

Rabbi Lamm's Arai and Keva

Rabbi Norman Lamm z"l has left this temporary world of ours for the permanent World to Come. In his lifetime, despite the burdens of his illustrious career, he made

Torah study *keva* (*Avos* 1:15), a fixed practice. All of his other myriad accomplishments he viewed, as did earlier generations, as relatively temporary (*B'rachos* 35b). His remarkable literary output in all areas of Torah interest, notwithstanding his communal responsibilities, continues to teach and inspire. His herculean efforts, which sustained our Yeshiva financially and enhanced its Torah study programs dramatically, place us all in his debt. As the Gemara (*B'rachos* 35b) teaches, those who made their Torah *keva* and their *melacha*, other work, *arai*, both their Torah and their work endure. As beneficiaries, then and even now, of Rabbi Lamm's Torah and his support, we must continue his commitment to excellence, in our Yeshiva and beyond. May Rabbi Lamm's multiple merits accrued in our temporal world, which can yield additional dividends if we serve Hashem better because of his influence, elevate his neshama in its *achilas keva* in the world of truth and permanence.



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