

A Succah for Two

והצנע לכת עם אלקיך.

And walk privately with your G-d.

Michah 6:8

Publicizing Divine Miracles

History shows that we prefer to thank Hashem in front of an audience. Biblically, Avraham and Sarah marked Yitzchak's weaning with a lavish feast. We sang communally when we crossed through the Sea, and once we entered Israel, our farmers thanked Hashem in public for the first of their crops. As King David pledged to Hashem, "I will thank You in a great gathering; in a mighty nation I will praise You."¹

The act of public gratitude to G-d is enshrined in halachah. We bring a *korban todah* in the Beit haMikdash as a thanks-offering when Hashem rescues us from harm, and along with it we provide forty loaves of bread for a feast.² Lacking the *korban todah* in our own unfortunate day, we thank Hashem by reciting *birkat hagomeil*, declaring in front of a minyan our gratitude for Divine rescue. Many Jews create a public *seudat hodayah* (thanksgiving feast) to mark occasions when they are rescued from harm,³ as Rambam reportedly did when he survived a dangerous sea voyage to the Land of Israel.⁴

Our drive to thank Hashem in public is clearly expressed in the halachic imperative of *pirsumei nisa* [publicizing miracles], which motivates us to light a chanukiah where all can see it,⁵ and to read Megilat Esther⁶ and recite Hallel⁷ in public. As explained by Rabbi Avraham Bornstein,⁸ we are instructed to advertise Divine deeds



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socially, specifically. Rabbi Bornstein writes that failure to fulfill *pirsumei nisa* in public, even due to unavoidable circumstances, would equal failure to celebrate altogether. Public celebration is a requirement for our community.

This model of public celebration breaks down, though, when we arrive at Succot.

The Privacy of Succot

The Talmud⁹ rules that women are obligated in lighting the chanukiah on Chanukah, because "women, too, were involved in the miracle."¹⁰ The Talmud rules likewise for the mitzvot of reading Megilat Esther¹¹ and drinking four cups of wine at the Pesach seder.¹² According to Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik,¹³ *pirsumei nisa* automatically includes women for these celebrations, because they were involved in the miracle.

On the other hand, women are not obligated to sit in the succah, even though they were also protected by Hashem in the wilderness. As explained by Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik, this is not because *pirsumei nisa* applies exclusively to men for this miracle. Rather, it is because there is no *pirsumei nisa* imperative, for men or women, regarding Hashem's protection in the wilderness.¹⁴ The mitzvah is only for

us to know, personally, that Hashem sheltered us in the wilderness.¹⁵ In the absence of a *pirsumei nisa* obligation, women are exempt from the mitzvah of succah despite the fact that they, too, were involved in that miracle.¹⁶

The shelter Hashem provided for our ancestors is not the only unsung miracle of the wilderness. Rabbi Meir ben Baruch of Rothenberg¹⁷ ruled that the principle of "women, too, were involved in the miracle" does not apply to the miracle of the manna, and therefore women are not obligated to commemorate the manna by eating the third meal on Shabbat. Within the logic presented by Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik, the absence of an obligation for women demonstrates that there is no *pirsumei nisa* imperative to publicize the miracle of the manna.¹⁸

We must then ask: Why are we instructed to publicize the Exodus, and the events of Chanukah and Purim, but not the miraculous shelter and food provided by Hashem during our travels in the wilderness?

Benevolence and Love

Rabbi Moshe Sofer¹⁹ suggested that the difference is danger. We were saved from danger in Egypt, and so men and women are commanded to mark the Exodus with matzah. Women are exempt from succah

because we faced no danger at that time. This idea is difficult, though; would we not have been in danger without the manna and the succah's Divine shelter?

Rabbi Ben-Zion Firer is quoted²⁰ as offering a second difference: Our role. We are obligated to publicize miracles in which we played an active part, like Chanukah and Purim. Succot memorializes Divine protection in which we did not take part, and so we do not have an imperative of *pirsumei nisa*. This approach is also difficult, for we did not play an active role in the miracles of Pesach, and yet we are instructed to publicize them.²¹

We might suggest a third distinction between Pesach, Chanukah and Purim on one hand, and Succot and the manna on the other: Relationship. The miracles of the former were acts of benevolence; the latter were acts of love.

Our ancestors were placed into slavery in Egypt due to national shortcomings; Tanach²² offers multiple suggestions for which of our flaws demanded that we experience such suffering. Regarding Chanukah, the Book of Maccabees²³ informs us that Jewish Hellenists embraced the decrees of Antiochus and enabled our persecution.²⁴ The Talmud blames Haman's initial success upon a variety of Jewish sins.²⁵ Seen in this context, the Divine miracles performed on these occasions rescued a nation that had endangered itself. Such an act of unearned Divine charity should be told and retold by the beneficiary to all who will listen, demonstrating that we recognize our guilt, that we wish to atone, and that we are grateful for Hashem's undeserved salvation.

Succot presents a remarkable contrast; the Jews marched into the wilderness not due to sin but due to our national

commitment to follow Hashem. This is the journey which Yirmiyahu²⁶ portrayed as "the kindness of your youth, the love of your wedding, following after Me in the wilderness, in an unsown land." The Jews who needed manna and the protective succah needed no penance; they experienced danger due to love for their Creator. On this occasion, Hashem performed a miracle as a reciprocal act of love; Hashem was the Lover, not the Savior. We treasure this love, and we pass along its history to our children, but we do not proclaim from the rooftops, "Our Beloved gave us a gift." As Michah²⁷ prescribed, this is a time for "walking privately with your G-d."²⁸

When we sit in our succot, may we recall the great love our ancestors displayed for Hashem in the wilderness, and the great love that Hashem displayed in return. May this inspire us to develop a similar bond of love with Hashem — resulting in the miraculous return of our entire nation to Zion.

Notes

1. Tehillim 35:18.

2. Netziv, *Haameik Davar* Vayyikra 7:13.

3. *Chayyei Adam* 155:41.

4. As cited in *Sefer Chareidim, Mitzvot haTeluyot b'Eretz Yisrael* 3.

5. *Shabbat* 23b.

6. *Megilah* 3b.

7. *Berachot* 14a, and see *Shibbolei haLeket* 174.

8. *Avnei Nezer, Orach Chaim* 501:1-3.

9. *Shabbat* 23a.

10. See Tosafot, *Pesachim* 108b, regarding whether this means that the women were in danger, or were agents of the miracle.

11. *Megilah* 4a.

12. *Pesachim* 108b, and *Avnei Nezer* ibid. Also, see Tosafot, *Succah* 38a Mi, regarding Hallel at the Pesach seder; I am not certain how to read this, in light of Tosafot *Megilah* 4a *She'af*.

13. As cited by Rabbi Ephraim Kanarfogel in *Or haMizrach* 32, pg. 125, and Rabbi Mayer Lichtenstein at <http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/kitveyet/shana/lichten-1.htm>.

14. Of course, we cannot characterize Succot as a fully private celebration. Like the other *regalim*, it involves a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, in which we offer korbanot in the Beit haMikdash. Further, the holiday includes a requirement to invite the Levite, stranger, widow and orphan into our celebration.

15. Vayikra 23:43.

16. For other explanations of why women are exempt from the mitzvah of succah, see Tosafot, *Pesachim* 108b *Hayu*.

17. *Shu"t Maharam meiRothenberg* 4:473, Prague edition, in response to *Sefer haYashar*.

18. Per Rabbi Bornstein in *Avnei Nezer* ibid., the Creation of the World also does not require publicity; we recite Kiddush on Shabbat, but it is a personal celebration.

19. *Chatam Sofer* 1:Orach Chaim 185.

20. <http://www.rabbidovidgoldwasser.com/Weekly%20Dvar%20Torah/november%2027%202013.pdf>. I am not sure how to square this citation with Rabbi Firer's essay in *Eileh Heim Moadai Succot* 4.

21. *Pesachim* 108b, Tosafot *Succah* 38a Mi, *Avnei Nezer* ibid.

22. Bereishit 15:8, as explained in *Nedarim* 32a; Yechezkel 20:8, as explained in *Mechilta d'Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai* 6; and see Ramban to Bereishit 12:10.

23. *Maccabees I* 1:17.

24. Indeed, some historians even argue that the Hellenists solicited the decrees from Antiochus; see Albert Baumgarten, "Elias Bickerman on the Hellenizing Reformers," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 97:2 (Spring 2007).

25. Talmud, *Megilah* 11a, 12a.

26. Yirmiyahu 2:2.

27. Michah 6:8.

28. Perhaps this is a reason why the Talmud (*Avodah Zarah* 3a-b, drawing on Zecharyah 14:16) uses succah as the future litmus test for the sincere commitment of the nations to Hashem and Torah. The succah demonstrates the loving bond of Hashem with the Jewish people, and one who is unworthy will not merit to fulfill it.