

SUCCOS

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The 3rd World

Earth, Afterlife, and...

**After High
Holidays**
SUCCOS' LESSON

**Lulav &
Succah**
THE LINK?



Forgiveness, Pardon, Atonement
WHAT'S THEIR DISTINCTION?

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3 Forgiveness

LETTERS

We just prayed for forgiveness, pardon and atonement. What are they?

4 Afterwards

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Succos follows New Years and Yom Kippur. Rabbi Mann explains why.

5 The 3rd World

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Succah underscores a Torah fundamental...what is it?

9 Lulav & Succah

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

What is the connection between these 2 that they combine in one holiday?

“Chazal say that one cannot perform a mitzvah just to receive a reward, but in tzedaka it is permissible. This is because if it is performed properly, it means God must return the kindness because God is the source of all kindness, of all tzedaka.”

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT**Q&As****RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

Forgiveness, Pardon, Atonement WHAT'S THEIR DISTINCTION?

RABBI: A friend questioned the distinction of these 3 matters for which we prayed last week on Yom Kippur. The authoritative source to define these is Torah:

The next day [after the gold calf sin] Moses said to the people, “You have been guilty of a great sin. Yet I will now go up to the LORD; perhaps I may win atonement for your sin” (Exod. 32:30)

Moses sought the best outcome: atonement. But what is atonement? Rashi explains:

[Moses said] I shall put an effacing and a wiping off and a covering in front of your sin, to serve as a barrier between you and your sin.

Preventing future sin is the meaning of atonement. But forgiveness refers to not responding to the sinner:

And the LORD said, “I forgive, in accordance with your words Moses (Num. 14:20)

This was God’s response not to kill the Jews all at once after the incident of the Spies. Sforno comments:

I had not intended to smite them all simultaneously; I had intended to let them all die, little by little, in the desert.

Sforno means God’s words “I forgive, in accordance with your words” is only forgiveness in relation to Moses’ wrong assumption. Moses thought God would kill the Jews immediately. But God’s method of “little by little” is a forgiveness relative to Moses’ incorrect assumption. It’s a lighter sentence relative to Moses’ thoughts. Thus, forgiveness refers to refraining from punishment, but the crime remains intact, and the one offended retains with a grievance. Whereas pardon refers to erasing a debt: a warden’s pardon eliminates the crime requiring any payment.

So in terms of ourselves, we seek forgiveness that we might continue to live without death or punishment. We also seek that our debt is removed which is pardon. But in terms of our relationship with God, we hope to no longer sin, as Moses sought to create some barrier that the Jews would never succumb to idolatry again. That barrier is atonement, and there is no greater atonement than when man sees with full clarity how sin harms him. ■

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After Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur

The Hebrew month of Tishrei is replete with significant Jewish holidays. Rosh Hashana falls on the first of the month, Yom Kippur on the tenth and Sukkot which lasts for 8 days (9 in the Diaspora) on the fifteenth. There seems to be a natural connection between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur as the former initiates the Ten Day's of Repentance and the latter completes it. But what about Sukkot which falls five days after the Day of Atonement; is it completely unrelated or intimately connected to the holidays which precede it?

In my opinion it is not by accident that Sukkot falls out just days after the High Holidays. The fact that there is a significant connection between them can be seen from Rambam. In his Mishne Torah he combines the laws pertaining to Shofar with those of Sukka and Lulav and places them in one Sefer (book). This is a clear indication of a relationship between these mitzvot. What might it be? What follows is my own speculation on this topic...

A key feature of the holiday of Sukkot is that of Simcha (joy). Rambam says, "Even though it is a mitzvah to rejoice on the other festivals, on the holiday of Sukkot there was an additional joy as it says, 'You shall rejoice before Hashem your G-d for seven days.'" He further says that, "The joy that one experiences in performing the mitzvot and in the love of G-d is a great service."

The essence of the joy one is obliged to experience is that it is lifnei Hashem (before G-d). In my opinion one cannot experience that emotion without the proper preparation, ie. without achieving the appropriate relationship with Hashem.

The process that leads to this begins on Rosh Hashanah. That is the time when we crown Hashem as the Ruler of the universe and thus acknowledge Him in all His glory and majesty.

Rosh Hashanah initiates the period known as the Ten Days of Repentance. The sense of awe we experience in recognizing the Ultimate Being impels us to reflect on our spiritual condition to see if our lives are in line with the reality of Hashem. The goal of man's existence is poignantly expressed in the Ne'ilah prayer of Yom Kippur: " You set man apart from the beginning and You considered him worthy to stand before you...Now You gave us, Hashem, our G-d, with love this Day of Atonement

for redemption, pardon and forgiveness...and return to You, to carry out the decrees of Your Will, wholeheartedly."

Are we living a life that conforms to His Will? Man cannot stand before Hashem if he is behaving in a manner which is contrary to the commandments. He must therefore engage in Teshuva so that his sins can be removed and he can joyfully enter into Hashem's presence. When he has done that he is ready to observe Sukkot.

The Mitzvah of dwelling in the Sukka calls on a person to leave the "security" of his abode and take refuge under the "wings of the Shechina." It teaches that no matter how much we try to obtain material protection for ourselves and our families there is just so far that we can go. Ultimately, the only true security one can attain in this life stems from the Providence of Hashem. Just as the Jews left the land of Egypt and, in entering the Wilderness, placed their faith in Hashem, so do we abandon our well fortified homes and take residence in flimsy huts which afford no visible protection and thus proclaim our absolute trust in the Lord. The experience of this special closeness to Hashem produces an intense feeling of joy.

There is another dimension to the Mitzvah of Sukka. It forces us to leave our homes which are filled with excessive material possessions which are way beyond what we truly need. In the Sukka we recognize that we have everything that we actually require in order to be happy. When a person contemplates his life and is Sameach bechelko (rejoices in his portion) then he feels great gratitude to Hashem and experiences the special joy of Sukkot before Hashem.

This lesson has great significance for our lives. One who is constantly pursuing more "things" cannot attain any deep sense of peace and satisfaction. It is only when man immerses himself in the study of Torah and pursuit of wisdom and good deeds that he realizes what he was created for and experiences a new type of happiness. May the High Holiday period which culminates with Sukkot, the "season of our joyfulness," afford us a new perspective on life and a taste of the happiness that each of us was created for.

Chag Sameach. ■

Rabbi Reuven Mann

The 3rd World

Earth, Afterlife, and...

RABBI MOSHE B EN-CHAIM





It is not mere theory, but factually, there exists another third world aside from Earth and afterlife. This must be so, and you can prove it to yourself. How? Ask yourself how Earth and the entire universe came to be. As nothing can create itself, something other than the universe brought it into existence. The same holds true for the afterlife. Of course we refer to God, who is the first cause, and before whom nothing else existed. But when God created the universe and the afterlife, He also created a system of non-physical laws that govern these 2 worlds.

For example, the better watchmaker is not the one who must move the hands every second to keep correct time. The superior watchmaker is the one who can create a system of springs, gears and dials which—following natural laws—moves the watch hands to display precisely accurate time, without the watchmaker’s continued intervention. The watch is autonomous. The greater painter is not the one who must apply paint to a canvas, brush stroke by brush stroke. But the more talented painter carefully arranges paint drops on a roller, and then with one roll of that roller over a blank canvas, a beautiful scene emerges with mountains, lakes, sky, sun and clouds, birds in flight and deer in the woods. That is far greater ingenuity, just like the superior watchmaker.

As man is capable of such ingenuity, certainly God can perform far greater feats. In fact, God brought the original tiny matter into existence with the amazing potential to unfold over billions of years into our great universe we see today.

Similarly, God built a Third World which runs on its own. This is the world of laws that exists not on Earth, but that govern Earth. We might assume nature law to be “on” Earth. But this cannot be, as the laws that govern Earth preceded Earth, in order that the subsequent Earth followed those blueprinted laws! Let that register...natural laws do not exist “on” Earth. They exist as all truths exist...as all wisdom exists, but not in space and time. They exist in a non-physical manner.

Now, what is even more amazing is that these laws are designed by God to self-adjust for righteous men and women. Justice guides the operation of these governing laws:

“Please test Me in this” said the Lord of Hosts. “I will surely open the storehouses of heaven and empty out for you a blessing that is more than sufficient” (Malachi 3:10).

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Rabbi Chait commented:

This means that God returns one's tzedaka tenfold. Chazal say that one cannot perform a mitzvah just to receive a reward, but in tzedaka it is permissible. This is because if it is performed properly, it means God must return the kindness because God is the source of all kindness, of all tzedaka. Why is the idea of tzedaka the most paramount and the most basic idea in Judaism? It is because tzedaka runs contrary to a very strong type of thinking: "hedonistic logic" as I would call it. Hedonistic logic tells you that if you give something away, you are losing. And you cannot show that to be wrong. But the essence of Judaism is that this type of logic is absolutely false. Beyond the hedonistic reality is a greater reality. If one is not in line with that greater reality he is simply not in line with Judaism. He denies the whole basis of Judaism, which is that a reality exists beyond the physical and instinctual reality that man perceives sensually. [God's promise above of abundant wealth for giving tzedaka overrides the hedonistic mathematical logic.] When one gives tzedaka it is not a loss, but a gain, because now he is in line with God. [The physical world is governed by laws that God created, controls and alters through His providence. All miracles in Torah convey this message, as does this promise of wealth if one tests God in tzedaka.] ("Ethics of the Fathers" Chap. 5, pp 273-274).

Maimonides commented on tzedaka:

Never has anyone become poor by giving to tzedakah, nor has anything bad ever come of it, nor has any harm occurred because of tzedakah, as it is said, (Isaiah 32:17) "The work of righteousness [tzedakah] is peace. "Anyone who shows compassion, others will show compassion to him, as it is said, (Deut. 13:18) "[May God] show you compassion, and let your compassion increase" (Mishne Torah, Gifts to the Poor 10:2).

God need not "step in" to our space/time system to make changes for the charitable person. But He has already designed Earth's laws to automatically favor righteous people. Abraham was to be barren, but due to his acts of perfection, coming closer to God, God's system of providence—this "Third World"—altered natural law and Abraham and Sarah bore a son. God is like the watchmaker and planned His mechanism of governing laws to respond to certain people at specific times. Pirkei Avos 5:6 says this exactly:

Ten things were created on the eve of the Sabbath at twilight, and these are they: [1] the

mouth of the earth, [2] the mouth of the well, [3] the mouth of the donkey, [4] the rainbow, [5] the manna, [6] the staff [of Moses], [7] the shamir, [8] the letters, [9] the writing, [10] and the tablets. And some say: also the demons, the grave of Moses, and the ram of Abraham, our father. And some say: and also tongs, made with tongs.

Pirkei Avos teaches this fundamental of a system that controls Earth. It is a world of principles and laws designed to favor righteous people. Even killing Korach and other evil people favors the remaining righteous and innocent people to not be misled by the wicked.

Maimonides commented:

At the beginning of things [Genesis] , He placed into [their] nature that they should do everything that they would do [in the future], whether they be things that would happen constantly, that being a natural thing; or whether it be [something unusual], that being a miracle. It is all one [regarding this]. Therefore they said that on the sixth day, He placed into the nature of the earth that it would sink [under] Korach and his community, and He placed into the well that it would give out water and into the donkey that it should speak, and so [too] for the rest.

God says will alter nature for the righteous:

And should you ask, "What are we to eat in the seventh year, if we may neither plant nor gather in our crops?" [God replies] I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years (Lev. 25:20,21).

God triples the crops' yield in year 6, if man obeys God. God also says He responds to our mitzvos and prayers:

[The righteous Jews confess they gave their crops as God commanded] "I have not eaten of it while in mourning, I have not cleared out any of it while I was unclean, and I have not deposited any of it with the dead. I have obeyed the LORD my God; I have done just as You commanded me. Look down from Your holy abode, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the soil You have given us, a land flowing with milk and honey, as You swore to our fathers" (Deut. 26:14,15)

Succah follows this theme. We leave our reliable homes and live in the Succah, a flimsy-roofed hut, a demonstration of our reliance upon God's third world. Chag Sameach! ■

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Lulav & Succah

THE LINK?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

READER: Can you please explain the relationship of the lulav and etrog to the succah? On most holidays, there is usually a relationship between the mitzvos and the holiday like matzoh on Pesach, or the succah and Succos. So what is the purpose of the lulav and etrog? I am finding it very hard to find any information. Of the many people I have spoken to, little information is known. The main response I get is, "We do it because we are commanded to by God." Well, this of course is a given, but I find this response problematic.

RABBI: In his book entitled Horeb^[1], Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explained a close relationship between the succah, etrog and lulav. I will mention his ideas, followed by my thoughts, stimulated by Rabbi Hirsch.

The Succah, a minimalistic structure, is to break man away from his materialistic lifestyle: the physical world is not the goal of our temporal earthly existence. The 4 species embodies the correct attitude towards the source of all physical good. We give thanks to God for His bountiful harvest: waving produce in all 4 directions, upwards and downwards, we demonstrate that God alone has complete dominion over the world.

The Talmud states, (Succah 37b):

Why do we wave the Lulav? R. Yochanan said, "We wave out and back (horizontally) to the One who owns all four directions on Earth, and we wave the Lulav up and down to the One Who owns heaven and Earth."

Rabbi Yochanan separates the two acts of waving "forward/back/left/right" from "up/down" to teach us that there are two areas of God's dominion which require our affirmation. God is the sole Creator of all. This is why we wave up and down, referring to heaven and Earth: all creation is contained in these two spheres. But if up and down covers all creation, what is left to recognize about God's greatness, as we wave in 4 directions too (forward, back, left, right)? This refers not to creation, but to God's government of mankind: God has complete knowledge/governance of man's travels on Earth (our actions) as alluded to by these "4 directions," which is limited to earthly activity. This subtle difference points us to the realization that there are two distinct areas in which

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we must attest to God's greatness: 1) God is omnipotent, He can do all, as He created heaven and Earth (waving up/down), 2) God is omniscient, He knows all, as He is aware of all our travels and actions (forward/back/left/right).

This theme is reiterated as the two main themes of the High Holiday prayers, Malchios (omnipotence), and Zichronos (omniscience). Rabbi Yochanan's view is that waving the four species on Succos must demonstrate God's dominion in all areas: His creation, and His government of man. We wave His creations up and down to demonstrate that He created all that is above, and all that is below. But He also governs all that He created, demonstrated by waving the species in all 4 directions. God's omnipotence and omniscience is again displayed in the Temple: the Menora possesses 7 branches (7=creation) and a table of 12 showbreads displays God's providence (food) over the 12 Tribes.

Why must the Succah be temporal and frail by design? Man sustains his false attempts to compensate for physical insecurity by striving for riches and earthly permanence, expressed in building luxurious homes. Succah breaks man away from his desire for physical security. Man must view God as his security, instead of viewing himself as the sole cause of his fortune. With his attachment to physical security, man removes God from the equation and fails to appreciate His vital role. Therefore, God commands us to dwell in a flimsy structure for a week, as a detach-

ment from our greatest physical security: our homes. God must retain central focus.

Lulav complements succah by emphasizing the use of the physical for the right reasons. We thank God—the Source of our bounty—replacing our faulty view of the physical with proper thanks to God for providing vegetation. All physical objects that we are fortunate to receive should be used in recognition of the Creator of these fruits, and not to reaffirm our own physical strength.

It also makes sense that Succah—not Lulav—is used to demonstrate man's required break from the physical. Man's home is the one object which embodies earthy permanence...not so man's food. Therefore, I believe a frail home (succah) is used as opposed to fruits, which are consumed objects, and do not afford man the satisfaction of permanence. Since man does not attach himself to fruits as he does his home, the home is from where man must make his break. Succah breaks down man's weighty attachment to the physical, while lulav redirects man's attachment towards God, the source of all our sustenance. This is the connection.

This explains why we read Koheles (Ecclesiastes) on Succos. In this philosophical masterpiece, King Solomon presents the correct philosophy for man in relation to God, labor, wealth, happiness, death, ego, accomplishments and myriads of attitudes and philosophies. Numerous times King Solomon states, "What extra is there for man in all his toil that he toils under the

sun?" He even commences his work with his summary, "Futility of futilities." The Rabbis questioned King Solomon's statement, "How can King Solomon say all is futile, when God said in Genesis that the world is very good?" The answer is that King Solomon only critiqued the physical as an end in itself. When God said it was good, He meant that as long as it serves only as a "means" to man's pursuit of wisdom and a perfected life. There is no contradiction between King Solomon and God (Rabbi Israel Chait).

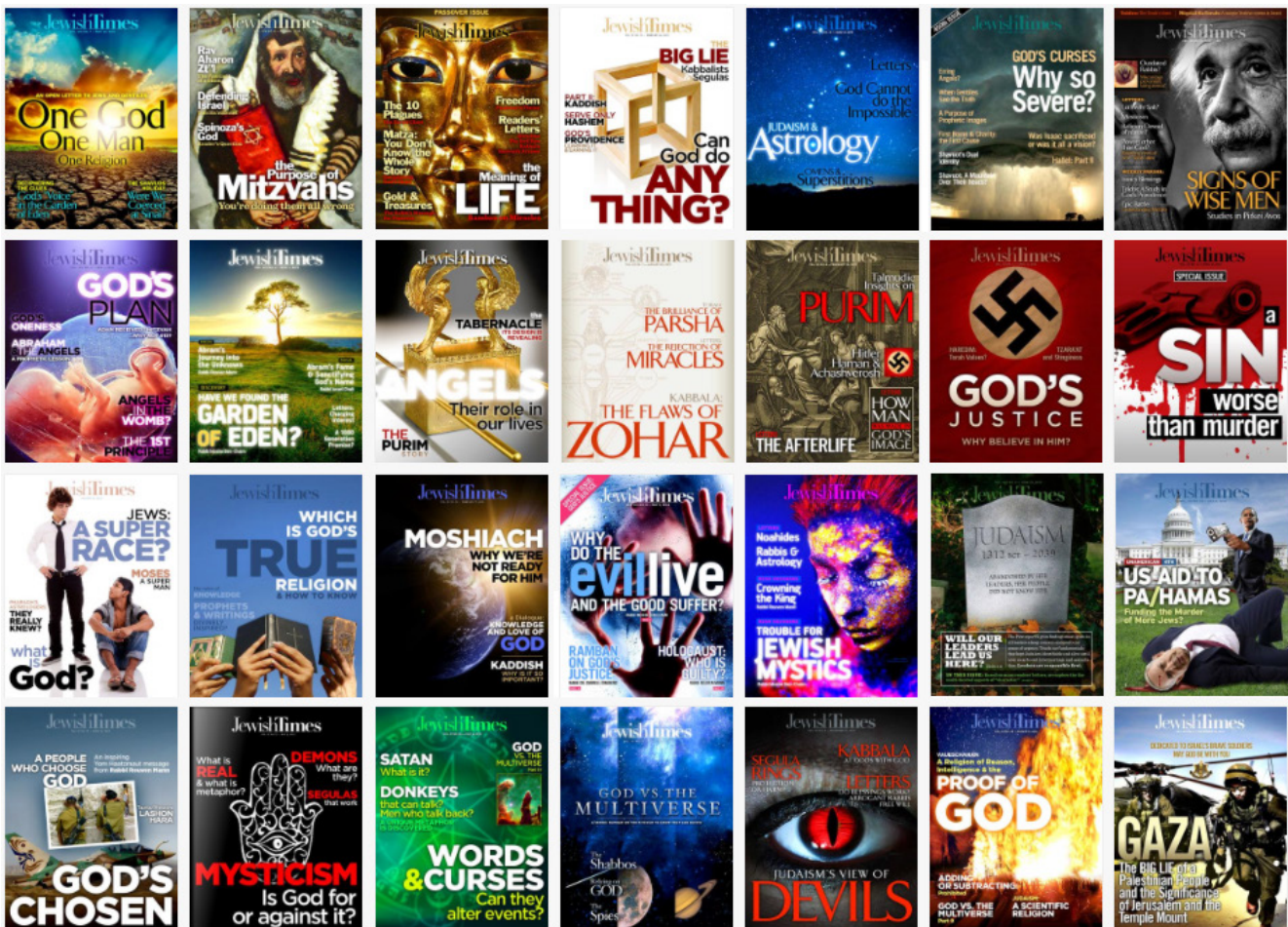
Fulfill the obligations of this Succos holiday. Adhere to the commands of eating, drinking, and certainly sleeping in the succah, even light naps. Make the succah (succah covering) from detached plant life such as reeds, wood, or bamboo, so you may gaze through the gaps at the stars as you lie on your bed, recognizing your Creator, the sole Creator of the universe. Wave the 4 species in all horizontal directions demonstrating God's exclusive dominion over all man's affairs. Wave them upwards and downwards, demonstrating God's exclusive creation of that which is up and down—heaven and Earth.

By living in these frail booths, may we strip ourselves of our false security, and may our waving of the lulav, esrog, haddasim and aravos redirect our security towards the One who provides a bountiful life, thereby realizing that our ultimate protection and security comes from God.

[1] Soncino Press, 6th English Edition 1997, pp 132 ■

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OUR PURPOSE: WISDOM & MORALITY



God created man to live by truths concerning Him, creation, others and ourselves.

We must study God's instruction about what He is, what is idolatrous or fallacy, we must study nature, psychology, philosophy and morality. This draws us closer to God and He to us, and creates societal harmony which fosters greater Torah for all.

MORE BELOW

Kindness: As equals, all humans must treat others as we wish to be treated. Charity, kindness and justice demand we rise above personal and selfish emotions and recognize that God made others as He made ourselves. Doing so creates harmony, and earns His kindness.

Racism: A Lie: Man descends from Adam. **Black/white twins** unveil the lie of racism. Bible denounces it: Moses' wife was black, our kings married Egyptians and Messiah descends from Moabites. "Better is the day of death than the day of birth" (Ecc. 7:9). Birth doesn't define us; how we live does.

Insecurity: Man's insecurities can be false, but reality is greater, as it is truth. Man seeks security about his future, accepting fallacies like astrology, amulets, omens, horoscopes and others. God prohibited such practices precisely because they are false. God is more powerful than false notions. Rely on Him alone.

Happiness: Many think wealth and success secure happiness. But Torah teaches happiness stems from study. When pursuing wisdom, one is most happy as Torah offers childlike amazement at every turn. Study offers the daily novelty necessary to retain interest and the depth that offers amazement.

Pleasing Others: Don't seek approval over truth. Torah says, "What can man do to me?" (Psalms 56:5). "Don't fear man" (Deut. 1:17). "Desist from man whose soul is in his nostrils, for what is he considered?" (isaiah 2:22). Mortal attention is irrelevant. Following God earns all goodness.

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