

JewishTimes

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SUCCOS 5774

Why these 4 species?

POSSIBILITIES

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כִּי יֵשׁ לְחֹרֵב הָרֶבֶת מִן הַיָּדֵיךָ
כִּי מִי יוֹדֵעַ מִה עֲשֵׂה לְאָדָם
הַבָּלִי וַיַּעֲשֶׂם כִּכָּל אֱשֶׁר
הָיָה אֲחֲזָרָיו תִּזְכֶּה הַשְּׁמַשׁ כֹּחַ
הַמִּזְוָה מִיּוֹם הוֹלְדוֹ שׁוֹב לְלִפְתָּ
כֹּתֶה אֶל בֵּית מִעֲדָתָה בְּאֶשֶׁר
וְהִזְדִּי יְהוָה אֶל רִאֲבֹ שׁוֹב כַּעַס
מִיָּטֵב לֵב לֵב חֲכָמִים בְּבִיחָה
בְּבֵית שִׁמְחָה שׁוֹב לְשִׁמְעַת אֶעֱרֹת
שְׂאִיר כַּסִּילִים כִּי כָהֵן הַסִּירִים
זֶה הַכִּסִּיל וְגַם זֶה הַבָּל כִּי הַעֲשֵׂה

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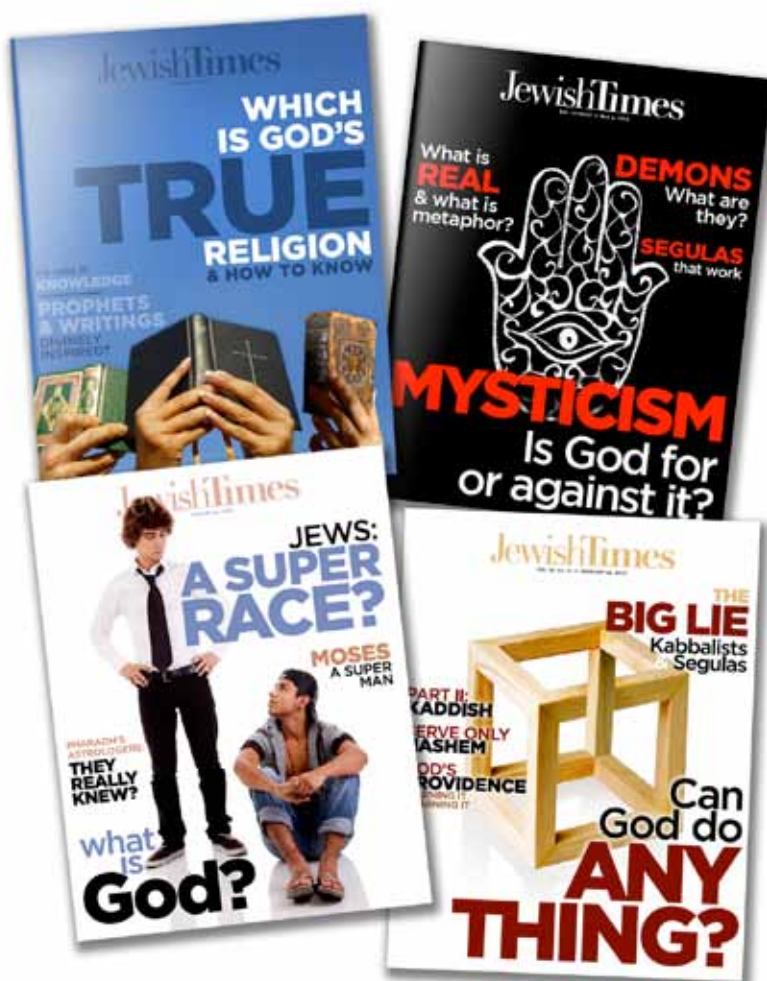
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LETTERS

Ushpizin: The walking dead?

Reader: Shalom. I wish that this email will find you and your loved ones in good health. Thank you for all your work.

Can you explain to me how to understand the topic of ushpizin without feeling I'm talking to the dead and violating avoda zara?

H'ag sameah'

Rabbi: If one thinks dead people visit him, this is foolish since none of his or her senses attests to this. If one attempts to communicate with the dead, this is prohibited. This is compounded by the second impossibility of a person existing in many locations at once. For many people assume the patriarchs visit many succahs. I cannot offer any explanation based on what I have heard. But I invite other readers to offer their understanding. ■

Ancient Golden Treasure Found at Foot of Temple Mount

"Ophel Treasure" apparently includes oldest Torah ornament ever found: medallion with Menorah, Torah and Shofar etchings



In summer excavations at the foot of the Temple Mount, Hebrew University of Jerusalem archaeologist Dr. Eilat Mazar made a stunning discovery: two bundles of treasure containing thirty-six gold coins, gold and silver jewelry, and a gold medallion with the menorah (Temple candelabrum) symbol etched into it. Also etched into the 10-cm medallion are a shofar (ram's horn) and the image of a Torah scroll.

The medallion may be the oldest Torah ornament ever found in archaeological digs.

A third-generation archaeologist working at the Hebrew University's Institute of Archaeology, Dr. Mazar directs excavations on the City of David's summit and at the Temple Mount's southern wall. Calling the find "a breathtaking, once-in-a-lifetime discovery," Dr. Mazar said: "We have been making significant finds from the First Temple Period in this area, a much earlier time in Jerusalem's history, so discovering a golden seven-branched Menorah from the seventh century CE at the foot of the Temple Mount was a complete surprise."

The discovery was unearthed just five days into Mazar's latest phase of the Ophel excavations, and can be dated to the late Byzantine period (early seventh century CE). The gold treasure was discovered in a ruined Byzantine public structure a mere 50 meters from the Temple Mount's southern wall.

The menorah, a candelabrum with seven branches that was used in the Temple, is now the national symbol of the state of Israel and reflects the historical presence of Jews in the area. The position of the items as they were discovered indicates that one bundle was carefully hidden underground while the second bundle was apparently abandoned in haste and scattered across the floor.

Given the date of the items and the manner in which they were found, Mazar estimates they were abandoned in the context of the Persian conquest of Jerusalem in 614 CE.

After the Persians conquered Jerusalem, many Jews returned to the city and formed the majority of its population, hoping for political and religious freedom. But as Persian power waned, instead of forming an alliance with the Jews, the Persians sought the support of Christians and ultimately allowed them to expel the Jews from Jerusalem. Hanging from a gold chain, the menorah medallion is most likely an ornament for a Torah scroll. In that case it is the earliest Torah scroll ornament found in archaeological excavations to date. It was buried in a small depression in the floor, along with a smaller gold medallion, two pendants, a gold coil and a silver clasp, all of which are believed to be Torah scroll ornamentations.

"It would appear that the most likely explanation is that the Ophel cache was earmarked as a contribution toward the building of a new synagogue, at a location that is near the Temple Mount," said Dr. Mazar. "What is certain is that their mission, whatever it was, was unsuccessful. The treasure was abandoned, and its owners could never return to collect it."


The Ophel cache is only the third collection of gold coins to be found in archaeological excavations in Jerusalem, said Lior Sandberg, numismatics specialist at the Institute of Archaeology. "The thirty-six gold coins can be dated to the reigns of different Byzantine emperors, ranging from the middle of the fourth century CE to the early seventh century CE," said Sandberg.

Found with the coins were a pair of large gold earrings, a gold-plated silver hexagonal prism and a silver ingot. Remnants of fabric indicated that these items were once packaged in a cloth purse similar to the bundle that contained the menorah medallion.

Mazar's Ophel excavation made headlines earlier this year when she announced the 2012 discovery of an ancient Canaanite inscription (recently identified as Hebrew), the earliest alphabetical written text ever uncovered in Jerusalem.

The 2013 excavation season at the Ophel ran from the middle of April to the end of July, on behalf of the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University. The Israel Antiquities Authority is carrying out the preservation works, and is preparing the site for the public. ■





SUCCAH & THE 4 SPECIES

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: Can you please explain the relationship of the lulav and etrog to succah. On most holidays, there is usually a relationship between the mitzvah 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, as we wave produce in all 4 directions, and 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 separated 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? This refers not to creation, but to God's government of mankind – that God has complete knowledge of man's travels on Earth (our actions) as alluded to by the "4 directions", which is limited to Earthly activity. This subtle difference points us to the realization that there are two distinct areas in which 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/backward/left/right).

This theme is reiterated as the two main themes of the High Holiday prayers, "Malchuyos" (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. And the Temple as well contains a Menora with 7 branches (creation) and a table of 12 loaves of showbread, displaying His providence over the 12 Tribes.

Why must the Succah be temporal and frail by design? Man continues false attempts to compensate for physical insecurity by striving for riches and Earthly permanence, expressed in impressive dwellings. Succah breaks man away from his insecurities regarding his wealth. Man must strive to focus on God as his Sole Benefactor, instead of relying on the work of his hands: "Limaan nechdal may'oshek yadaynu", "So we might forgo the indulgence of our hands" is recited in Neilah on Yom Kippur. The drive towards the physical as an ends, removes God from man's life. Therefore, God commands us to dwell in a flimsy structure for a week, as a detachment from our man made securities. 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 faulted view of the physical, with this proper thanks to God for providing vegetation. All physical objects that we are fortunate to receive should be used in recognition of the Supplier 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 Earthly 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

(continued on next page)

must make his break. Succah breaks down man's weighty attachment to the physical. Lulav redirects that 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, people, death, and accomplishments. King Solomon states numerous times, "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 Solomon was referring only to the physical as an 'ends' in itself as futile. 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 seach (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 4 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 and esrog 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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WHY THESE 4

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Regarding the vegetation we wave, one item is surely sufficient to demonstrate thanks for God's produce. Why then do we require 4 items? These 4 species might refer to a few major categories wherein God benefits man. These are merely my suggestions based on the species' unique features.

The palm branch can refer to dates or honey, but it is more closely identified with its function as a branch that fans-out as it ripens, providing shade. The esrog skin is tougher than most produce, thereby remaining intact over 7 days of handling. This may simply be a practical selection for representing sustenance. The hadassim are fragrant, offering man this enjoyment, and the aravos can represent the lush green lawn covering the Earth.

So we might suggest that these items are waved in thanks to God who benefits man by offering us shelter (palm), various foods (esrog), pleasant aromas (hadassim), and an Earth that is not unsightly and barren, but carpeted with greenery (aravos).

Respectively, these correlate to 4 of our senses: touch (comfort of shade), taste (esrog), smell (hadassim) and sight (beauty of a green Earth).

We may then say that God designed this mitzvah as a means of our remaining aware of the sensual pleasures He grants His creatures. Living satisfied in all our senses, we are perfectly suited to pursue a life of wisdom, without want. ■



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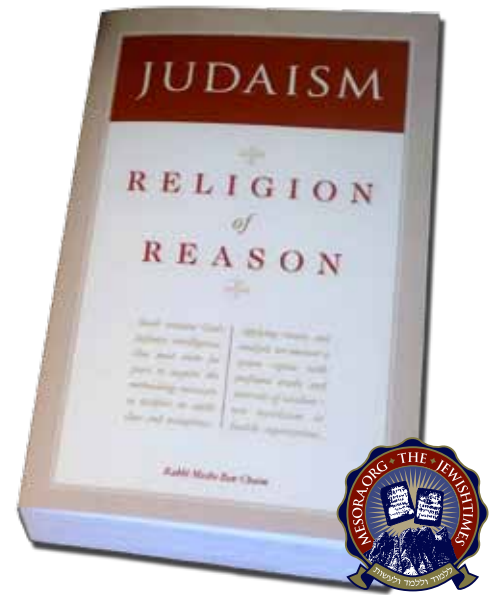
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REVIEWS



RABBI REUVEN MANN — Rabbi, Y. Israel of Phoenix

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim has written extensively on Jewish philosophy for many years. His ideas are rooted in a rational approach. He follows the great philosophers like Rambam and Saadia Gaon. He is opposed to all forms of "mysticism" and seeks to debunk all practices and beliefs which are rooted in superstition and contrary to reason. This work covers a wide variety of topics, of interest to contemporary; insightful analyses of Biblical narratives as well as the significance of many mitzvot. Rabbi Ben-Chaim demonstrates that Judaism can be harmonized with human reason. He is not afraid to ask the most penetrating and challenging questions as he is convinced that Torah is the Word of God and based on the highest form of wisdom. Jews who have a profound desire to make sense out of their religion will benefit greatly from reading this book.



RABBI STEVEN WEIL — Executive Vice President, The Orthodox Union

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim asks critical, crucial and defining questions that any thinking Jew needs to ask. His method enables the reader to explore and engage our theology in a meaningful and serious way. Following the Rishonim, he forces us to define, weigh and analyze each phrase of chazal, showing there is no contradiction between an investigation of Science and an investigation of Judaism. Rabbi Ben-Chaim has written a work that addresses the thinking person of all faiths. This work speaks to the scholar and lay person alike and will help you gain insight into how the great Rishonim define how we view the world. Rabbi Ben-Chaim's website, Mesora.org is a very serious tool and resource for thinking human beings who want to engage and explore the Almighty, the Almighty's universe and do so within the realm of wisdom, rationality and intellectual honesty.



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Where did God go? He's waiting for **SUCCOT!** Rabbi Bernie Fox

Forgive us our father for we have sinned....
(Weekday Amidah)

1. The close of Yom Kippur and the sense of Hashem's departure

Immediately after the completion of Yom Kippur we recite the weekday Maariv/Aravit service – the evening service. The service includes the Amidah which is composed of nineteen berachot – blessings. The sixth benediction is a petition to Hashem for forgiveness. This blessing is the basis of an amusing witticism. How is it possible that a few moments after the completion of Yom Kippur, which hopefully secured Hashem's forgiveness, we are again asking for His forbearance? What sin could we have committed in these few moments? The answer is that in our eagerness to rush home and break our fast, we barely pay attention to the prayers we are reciting. The very manner in which we are praying is the sin that requires forgiveness.

Of course, the question is only asked for the purpose of introducing the answer. The true answer to the question is very simple. The Amidah has a specific design and the weekday version is composed of its nineteen benedictions. Whenever the weekday version is recited all of the blessings are included. However, although the question is not serious, the answer does capture a disturbing paradox. Yom Kippur is a day of solemn majesty. We stand before Hashem and we are being judged. Our actions are being reviewed and our destiny decided. We are overcome with awe. We sense the presence of the Divine influence. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Zt"l compared the Shofar blast sounded at the end of the Yom Kippur service to the blast heard by Bnai Yisrael after the Sinai Revelation. That blast communicated that Revelation had ended and that Divine influence had "ascended" back to the heavens. The Shofar blast at the close of the Yom Kippur service communicates that our encounter with Hashem has ended. Our sense of intimacy with Him is lost.¹

How do we translate the Yom Kippur experience into an ongoing awareness of Hashem's presence or influence? How do we extend the intimacy of Yom Kippur into the whole year?

You are sacred and Your name inspires awe. There is no other G-d like unto you, as it is written, "And Hashem the Lord of Hosts will be exalted in judgment and the sacred G-d will be sanctified in justice." (Amidah of High Holidays)

2. The High Holidays and Hashem's reign over the universe

The first step in answering this question is to more carefully consider the capacity of the Yamim Noraim – the High Holidays to inspire us. There are two inter-related elements of the Yamim Noraim that endow these days with their inspirational power. The first is that these days celebrate Hashem's kingship over the entire universe. Repeatedly we describe Him as master of all. We recognize that every event that occurs and every process that takes place is an expression of His will. He is revealed in the blowing of the wind and the shining sun. The spider inexorably spinning its web is responding to the nature that the Creator implanted within it. The branch reaching up to the rays of the sun is acting according to a set of commandments decreed by the ruler of all natural phenomena.

We come to understand that during the Yamim Noraim we are participating in an inexplicable drama. This omnipotent ruler of all that exists eagerly beckons us – mortal, powerless, flawed creations – to return to Him and renew our relationship with Him.

(continued on next page)

Blessed are You, Hashem, the King Who pardons and forgives our iniquities and the iniquities of His people, the Family of Israel and removes our sins every year, King over all the world, Who sanctifies Israel and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur Amidah)

3. The High Holidays and judgement

Second, we recognize that the King has ascended His throne and is judging His subjects. No one can escape His judgment and His decree cannot be ameliorated. We recognize that our destiny is being decided by Hashem – who knows all and whose judgment is absolute.

These perceptions overcome the illusions we foster regarding our destiny. Generally, we consistently assure ourselves that we control our fates. We believe in the power of our own wisdom, the efficacy of our efforts, and our capacity to overcome all obstacles by dint of our determination. The Yamim Noraim strip away this self-indulgent illusion. They break through the barriers of conceit that we have erected around us and impose upon us the realization that we are actually puny, impotent creatures. We lack the capacity to protect ourselves from a virus carried by a tiny insect – one the most insignificant creatures in our environment. How can we delude ourselves into believing that we are the masters of our destiny? Within us emerges the realization that we are completely dependent upon Hashem. Our destiny is determined by His decree and we are powerless to defy His will.

And You gave us, Hashem our G-d, with love, this day of Yom Kippur for pardon and forgiveness, and to pardon on it all of our sins, a sacred occasion, a memorial to the exodus from Egypt. (Yom Kippur Amidah)

I am for my beloved and my beloved is for me...
(Shir HaShirim 6:3)

4. The High Holidays as a rendezvous with Hashem

This overwhelming sense of awe is accompanied by a sense of intimacy. Hashem beckons unto us to return to Him. He invites us to come before Him. He calls unto us to restore the relationship that we have weakened through our trespasses, our willfulness, and even our rebellion. Awe and intimacy combine to create an overpowering force that inspires us. We feel the presence of the Creator and we renew our commitment to serve Him and to be faithful to His commandments.

In short, the intensity of the Yamim Noraim experience derives from the replacement of our self-imposed delusions of strength and independence with the reality of our frailty, our absolute dependence upon Hashem, and His ever-present invitation to approach Him – His beckoning call that we return to Him.

If we can resist our innate tendency to delude ourselves with fantasies of our own omnipotence and retain our perception of both our dependence upon Hashem and His accessibility, then we can extend the inspiration of the Yamim Noraim beyond its boundaries and endow our entire year with the inspiration of these special days. But how can we overcome our natural tendency to succumb to our illusions?

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof; Let the field exult; and all that is therein; then shall all the trees of the wood sing for joy; (Psalms 96:11-12)

5. The four species of Succot and their message

The festival of Succot centers around two mitzvot. One is the mitzvah of the four species. These are the palm branch, the citron, the myrtle, and the willow. The four species are elements of the natural world that is Hashem's obedient servant. The species and the universe they represent perfectly obey the master Who commands the laws that govern all natural phenomena. Every element of the universe from the angels in the heavens to the sub-atomic particle in unison extols Him. Their unflagging obedience to His irresistible will expresses the most beautiful and sublime praise.

However, He challenges humanity to choose to reflect His will. This exalted state is not imposed upon humankind. Instead, humankind must come to this state through election. Humanity can elect to reflect His will. This election completes the tapestry of the universe and a work of breathtaking beauty and wonder emerges. Alternatively, humanity can reject Hashem and deny His will. This election mars the tapestry with discord and confusion.

On Succot we grasp these species. We hold them and wave them as we praise our Creator. We express our earnest desire to join the universe in its exalted praise of Hashem. We acknowledge the natural world is but a reflection of the wisdom and omnipotence of Hashem. It is His servant and messenger responding obediently to his irresistible will. In the quiet passing of the breeze and the soft flutter of the wings of a tiny bird, we hear the thunder of nature's praise for its Creator. As we grasp these species we express our deep desire to join this chorus and to blend our praise into the song of the universe.²

You shall dwell in booths seven days. All that are home-born in Israel shall dwell in booths, so that your generations may know that I caused the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt. I am Hashem your G-d. (Sefer VaYikra 23:42-43)

6. The message of the succah

The second commandment that is unique to the celebration of Succot is dwelling in the succah – a booth. The Torah directs us to leave our homes and to live in these temporary booths for the duration of the festival. According to the Torah, the mitzvah recalls the booths or the covering of clouds that protected Bnai Yisrael during its sojourn in the wilderness. The commentators note that the sole intent of the mitzvah is not to recall this historical event. Instead, the mitzvah directs us to leave the security of our homes and to establish these flimsy booths as our residencies. Through this experience we are reminded of our dependence upon Hashem and we recall that in the hostile environment of the wilderness, He provided us with complete protection and security.³

However, the mitzvah has an even greater significance in the context of its season. The Yamim Noraim emphasized our dependence upon Hashem. With the passing of the Yamim Noraim, we are challenged to cling to this cognizance of our helplessness and our dependence upon Hashem. In order to succeed, we must confront the elaborate measures we take to convince ourselves that we are the masters of our destinies and that we have the power to secure favorable futures and to ward-off disaster.

Our homes are one of the most powerful components of our delusion. Within our home we feel a sense of security. We feel that

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we are protected from those who would harm us. The elements are held at bay. For many of us, our homes project our sense of authority, our pride, and our feelings of accomplishment and triumph. Of course, this is an illusion. Our homes provide little protection against an adversary who truly wishes to harm us. In our homes we are sheltered from mild variations in the elements. We are protected from common winds and rain. However, our homes provide no protection against a true onslaught of the terrible forces of nature – a hurricane or earthquake. We may delude ourselves into believing that the grandeur of our homes reflects our own greatness. However, how many great fortunes have been lost overnight? How many vibrant, healthy lives have been taken by sudden inexplicable illness or tragic accident?

Hark! My beloved! Behold, he cometh, leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. (Shir HaShirim 2:8)

7. Rediscovering Hashem in the succah and synagogue

Forced to abandon our homes for the duration of the festival we feel exposed, vulnerable, and almost helpless. Suddenly, we reencounter Hashem! Stripped of the delusion of power and control, we rediscover the Creator of the Yamim Noraim. Again,

as we listen intently, we hear Him beckon unto us. He awaits us in the succah. He anticipates us at the synagogue. He is eager to hear our voices added to the chorus of creation that extols His praises.

Through Succot, we renew and extend our encounter with Hashem. We confront the complex delusions that we construct around us to ward away our insecurities. With the deconstruction of these delusions, we rediscover that the only true security is provided by Hashem. Again, we realize that He awaits us. ■

1. Rav Herschel Schachter, Recorded lecture, YUTorah.org.

2. This explanation of the message of the four species is suggested by various sources that associate the mitzvah with Tehilim 96:12. In this chapter King David asserts that the heavens, earth and their component parts give praise unto Hashem. Among the texts that associate the mitzvah with this chapter are Yalkut Shimoni, VaYikra, 23:651; Midrash Tanchumah, Emor, chapter 18; Shaarei Teshuvah, 660:1. The association of the mitzvah with this chapter indicates that the mitzvah makes reference of the praise to Hashem that is reflected in the universe of natural phenomena. This association does not explain the selection of specifically these four species for the purpose of communicating this idea. The selection of specifically these species is discussed extensively in the midrash and among the commentaries.

3. See for example, Rashbam VaYikra 23:43.



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Chag ha'Sukkos: Taking Lulav to Heart

Agur bin-Yakeh

One of the most fundamental truths about mitzvos is that they are for our benefit – not for Hashem's. This is true both for the mishpatim, whose reasons are obvious, and for the chukim, whose reasons are less obvious. Moshe Rabbeinu emphasizes this point throughout Sefer Devarim: "Hashem commanded us to do all of these chukim to fear Hashem, our God, for our good all of the days, to live, as this day" [1] "To keep the mitzvos of Hashem and His chukim which I command you this day, for your benefit." [2]

Mitzvas lulav [3] is a strange-looking mitzvah. We take three species of plant and one unusual fruit, pick them up, and wave them all around – once a day, for seven days. We know, based on the aforementioned principle, that mitzvas lulav must benefit us in some way. The question we will take up in this dvar Torah is a simple one: How does mitzvas lulav benefit us? [4]

Ibn Ezra lays down a principle which paves the way for understanding all mitzvos. Moshe Rabbeinu said: "For [the Torah] is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it." [5] Ibn Ezra [6] explains:

in your mouth and in your heart – for the root of all mitzvos is in the heart (i.e. the mind [7]); some mitzvos involve a verbalization in order to strengthen [the knowledge] in the mind; others involve an action in order to [stimulate] speech.

In other words, mitzvos which involve speech and action are not an end in and of themselves, but are a means of strengthening the knowledge in our minds. Halacha may only require us to verbalize a statement or do an action to fulfill our obligation, but from a philosophical standpoint, a

mitzvah is truly fulfilled only when it affects our mind. This is the type of mitzvah observance that Hashem desires (so to speak).

A good example of this is the mitzvah of eating matzah on the night of Pesach. Halachically speaking, our obligation is simply to eat a kazayis of matzah. If a person ingests this quantity of matzah without any knowledge of why Hashem commanded it, he has still fulfilled his halachic obligation 100%.

Philosophically, however, the eating of the matzah is a means – not an end in and of itself. Chazal explain that matzah is referred to as "lechem oni" because it is a "lechem she'onim alav devarim harbeh" ("a bread upon which many things are answered"). The mitzvah to eat matzah is designed to get us to talk about matzah and all of the ideas it represents, such as avdus (slavery), geulah (redemption), chipazon (the haste with which Hashem took us out), and so on. A discussion of these topics should, in turn, lead to a discussion of all the fundamental ideas in which they are rooted. For example, one cannot discuss avdus and geulah without discussing the true purpose of human existence; a complete discussion of chipazon will lead to a discussion of hasgachah pratis (divine providence) and nissim (miracles) – how they work, and their role they play in our lives and our history; both of these topics naturally lead to a discussion of Who Hashem Is, and what He wants from us. Ideally, these discussions shouldn't take place exclusively at the seder, but they should be the topics of our conversation in the days and weeks leading up to the seder and after the seder. All of these discussions are stimulated by our obligation to eat matzah.

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But that's not all. The ultimate goal is not merely to discuss these ideas with our mouths, but to internalize them in our minds – to allow them to shape our value systems, the way we view reality, and the way we live. This is what Ibn Ezra means when he says that “the root of all mitzvos are in the mind.” Mitzvos of speech and action are designed to affect our minds, which is the true purpose of all mitzvos.

Now we are in a position to understand how mitzvas lulav was designed to benefit us. The Sefer ha'Chinuch [8] begins his explanation by reviewing the purpose of tefillin. He explains that we are commanded to place tefillin on our head (opposite our brain, which is the seat of our intellect) and on our arm (opposite our heart, which is the seat of our knowledge). This is designed to help us continually focus our thoughts on The Good, and to ensure that our actions conform to uprightness and righteousness.

He then explains that a similar function is served by the arbaah minim. Chag ha'Sukkos takes place at the end of the harvest season. This is naturally a time of simchah (joy), in which we are able to kick back and enjoy the fruits of our labor for which we toiled all year. Since this type of simchah – namely, rejoicing over material success – tends to draw a person away from yiras Hashem (fear of God), Hashem commanded us to physically take hold of objects which remind us that all of our simchah should be for the sake of knowing Hashem and recognizing His greatness – not animalistic self-gratification.

The Sefer ha'Chinuch maintains that these objects serve as appropriate reminders because their physical qualities cause people to rejoice. Rambam [9], on the other hand, holds that these objects are significant because they are beautiful specimens of growth which



remind us of the contrast between the barren Midbar (wilderness) in which we dwelled for 40 years and the fertile Land into which Hashem brought us. Either way, both Rishonim agree that these four species are designed to harness the natural simchah we feel at this time of year and channel it towards recognition of Hashem.

Rashbam [10] adds that this reminder is designed to save us from the mentality of “kochi v'otzem yadi” (“My might and the power of my hand made me all this wealth” [11]), which we are particularly susceptible to whenever we bask in an abundance of material goods. The arbaah minim are designed to

remind us “that Hashem is the One Who gave you the ability to make wealth.” [12]

As we start our year afresh after the kaparah (atonement) of Yom ha'Kippurim and conclude the current cycle of moadim (holidays), let us remember that mitzvos of actions – such as matzah and lulav – do not automatically benefit us. The benefit we gain from these mitzvos is directly proportionate to the amount of thought we put them. The more we learn about the mitzvos and their reasons, the more they will achieve the objectives they were designed to achieve. May we all merit to understand the mitzvos that we keep! ■

[1] Sefer Devarim 6:24

[2] *ibid.* 10:13

[3] This mitzvah is “officially” known as arbaah minim (four species), but is often called “mitzvas lulav” because lulav is the most prominent of the four. The two names of the mitzvah will be used interchangeably here.

[4] Needless to say, there isn't only one right answer. The true aim of this dvar Torah is to convey an approach.

[5] *ibid.* 30:14

[6] Rabbeinu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Devarim 30:14

[7] Ibn Ezra, like many other meforshim, maintain often learn “heart” to be a reference to the mind rather than the emotions. See, for instance, Ibn Ezra's commentary on Devarim 6:5, Tehilim 16:9, and Tehilim 84:3.

[8] Sefer ha'Chinuch, Mitzvah #324

[9] Rabbeinu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides), Guide for the Perplexed 3:43

[10] Rabbeinu Shlomo ben Meir (Rashbam), Commentary on Sefer Vayikra 23:43

[11] Sefer Devarim 8:17

[12] *ibid.* 8:18



SEEING STARS

RABBI HESHY ROTH

We learn that the Schach (the roof of the Succah) must allow gaps so we might view the stars through it's covering. This is to assist us in witnessing God's stellar creations suspended in the heavens, and recall His majesty. We are to realize that God is essential to our shelter. Why then must a Succah's covering exist at all? Would we not see the stars all that much clearer, had no roof existed? What is the philosophy behind the Succah's partial covering, if in fact, any covering obscures what we might envision?"

The purpose of Succah is that we are to leave our permanent homes, and dwell in the Succah ? a minimal dwelling ? so as to demonstrate our true dependency is on God, and not the physical protection provided by a sturdy roof. Doing so, gazing through the sparse Schach, helps us achieve this objective. Why then have Schach at all?!

God does not want man to live where he rejects God's natural world and its laws, and simply sits back waiting for miracles; that God should do everything for him. No. God designed the natural world for a reason: that man use his mind and harness it, as God says in Genesis 1:28, "...fill the Earth and subdue it". Man must act in accordance with its reality. Reality teaches us that we do need shelter, and that there are methods by which to procure that, and all our needs. We are to engage in these methods, be it natural science, engineering, math, etc. But we cannot depend on physical shelter alone, without God. Schach is a fundamental lesson: it combines man's attempt at sheltering himself with the realization that man's efforts always require God assistance. Schach - a structure which man creates but allows gaps to see God's stars - demonstrates the combination of man's obligatory attempts of physical shelter, with God's providence (the gaps). Thereby, man reflects on God's heavenly bodies, and reminds himself that just as his brick home is equally dependent on God, so too, all else is not exclusively in our hands. The true lesson of Succos is that man abandons the fallacy that he can address all his needs without God. ■



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