

The Path to Follow

PARSHA

**SHABAT HOL
HAMOED SUKOT**

**OCTOBER 11TH 2014
TISHRI 17TH 5775**

565



PREPARING THE HOME FOR THE SHECHINAH

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

The haftarah that we read on the second day of Sukkot deals with the inauguration of the First Temple built by King Solomon. The glorious ceremony that was held during the festival of Sukkot was truly majestic, as recorded in Scripture: “They gathered before King Solomon – every man of Israel – for the festival [of Sukkot], in the month of Ethanim, which is the seventh month” (I Kings 8:2). Why did King Solomon choose to inaugurate the Temple during Sukkot, rather than during Pesach or even Shavuot, the day that the Torah was given? What’s the connection between the festival of Sukkot and the inauguration of the Temple?

Our Sages have established a relationship between the verse, “A lion has roared; who will not fear?” (Amos 3:8) and the month of Elul, the Zodiac symbol of which is the lion. In fact the Sages teach (Shlah, beginning of tractate Rosh Hashanah) that the letters comprising the word aryeh (“lion”) – aleph, resh, yud and hei – are also the initials of Elul, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Hashanah Rabbah.

In all good Jews who yearn for the truth and want to return to G-d, this roar leads to profound regret for past misdeeds and a desire to repent. In fact who wouldn’t tremble upon hearing the lion? During this month, G-d is closer to us than during any other month, and it is always easier to appease the king when he is near. Thus during the month of Elul, Hashem draws closer, as it were, to the Jewish people, meaning that any sensible person will immediately start to repent and devote himself to performing good deeds so as to obtain a favorable judgment on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Hashem, Who is merciful and patient, does not sit in judgment when the great and terrible day of judgment comes. This time is described as “the moon’s covering [kesseh], at the time appointed for our festive day” (Tehillim 81:4). The King of kings covers Himself (mitkhasseh) from the Satan in order to prevent him from accusing the Jewish people.

Where does He go to “cover Himself”? As He distances Himself from the Satan, He draws closer to us and reveals Himself in order to grant us forgiveness. At the same time, the Satan waits for the King to judge – but Israel has already blown the shofar, causing the Satan to flee. In this way, the accuser is prevented from uttering accusations.

Although the Satan does not have a chance to attack the Jewish people on Rosh Hashanah, he still holds a record of their sins. Nevertheless, these sins diminish from day to day as they regret their mistakes and repent, thus erasing the majority of them until there is nothing left to be accused of, and all arguments against them become invalid.

When the Satan finally examines the sins of the Jewish people in the hope of accusing them, the holy day

of Yom Kippur arrives. On this day, the Satan does not have the right to speak, as our Sages point out in the Gemara: The term Satan has a numerical value of 364, and since a year is composed of 365 days, we deduce that on Yom Kippur the Satan is powerless (Yoma 20a). On this day, he does not have authority to accuse the Jewish people, whose sins have been forgiven by G-d on account of the sanctity of the day, even if their repentance is not yet complete.

Everyone’s heart is filled with dread during these Days of Awe, for no one knows if he has been judged worthy and inscribed in the Book of Life. To avoid any trace of sorrow – since the Shechinah does not dwell where there is sorrow (Shabbat 30b) – Hashem follows Yom Kippur with Sukkot. This is a time for rejoicing, eating, and drinking, for we are confident that G-d has written nothing against us, and that everything He does is for our good.

Bakesseh: Same Letters as Besukkah

We can now better understand why King Solomon decided to inaugurate the Temple during Sukkot. As we know, “The deeds of the fathers are a sign for the children.” Just as King Solomon inaugurated the Temple in the month of Tishri, when Hashem is close to us, we are all expected to inaugurate our own homes and turn them into a fitting abode for the Shechinah, meaning that we should repent in order to make it accessible to the Shechinah.

When do we have an opportunity to prepare our homes for the Shechinah to reside in it? It is when G-d is close to us.

There doesn’t exist a more suitable time to draw closer to Hashem than the month of Tishri. Hence G-d says to us, “My children! Make sukkot after the days of judgment. Leave your fixed homes and come into a temporary dwelling, in order that you may realize that your journey in this world is but a temporary one, and that your primary dwelling is in the World to Come. If you prepare yourself in the temporary dwelling, you can enter the permanent dwelling, as the Mishnah states: ‘This world is like a corridor before the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the corridor so that you may enter the banquet hall’ [Pirkei Avoth 4:16].”

The festival of Sukkot is an integral part of the Days of Awe, being connected to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, when all the inhabitants of the world are judged. Just as G-d covers Himself (mitkhasseh) from the Satan on Rosh Hashanah, likewise He covers (mekhasseh) the mouth of the Satan on Sukkot.

The term bakesseh (the moon’s covering – i.e., the new moon) is formed by the same letters as besukkah (“in the sukkah”), testifying to the similarity between Rosh Hashanah and Sukkot. At both times, Hashem covers Himself from the Satan and our accusers.

Thus the verse states, “Sound the shofar at the moon’s covering,” for the entire month is hidden from the Satan, who cannot accuse the Jewish people.

Publication of
HEVRAT PINTO

Under the Direction of
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Pinto Shlita**

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In the Shadow of Faith

The Mitzvah of Setting up a Sukkah and Dwelling in it

When the Children of Israel left Egypt, they first camped in sukkot, or huts. Some of our Sages say that the Holy One, blessed be He, made them real huts, while others tell of being surrounded by the seven Clouds of Glory. Both opinions are the words of the living G-d. At first He made them real huts, and since they left their homes in Egypt to dwell in temporary huts without complaining, the Holy One, blessed be He, surrounded them with the Clouds of Glory, in the shadow of His sukkah. That said, the Children of Israel were commanded, at that time and for all future generations: "You shall dwell in sukkot for a seven-day period. Every native in Israel shall dwell in sukkot, so that your generations will know that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in sukkot" (Vayikra 23:42-43).

A Mitzvah that Presents Itself

The mitzvah of setting up a sukkah, the Rema writes in the name of the Maharal (Hilchot Sukkah 625), comes immediately after Yom Kippur, for when the opportunity to fulfill a mitzvah comes your way, you must not delay. Those who are meticulous about fulfilling mitzvot start setting up their sukkah as soon as Yom Kippur ends, in order to proceed from one mitzvah to another. The commentators deduce this custom from the following juxtaposition: "So Esav started back that day on his way toward Seir. But Jacob journeyed to Sukkot" (Bereshith 33:16-17).

The commentators give another reason for why the mitzvah of the sukkah comes immediately after Yom Kippur: It is in order for the sukkah to be built by a person when he is clean of all sin, so that the Shechinah may rest upon the work of his hands (Tosefet Chaim 145). If it is difficult for a person to set up a sukkah at the end of Yom Kippur, because he has fasted and is tired, or because he is not used to setting up a sukkah himself for whatever reason, the Kaf HaChaim offers the following advice: "He should, at the very least, speak to his family about the sukkah."

Like Exile

The Eliya Rabba points out that we must certainly not begin to set up the sukkah before Yom Kippur, for the Sages have said, "Why do we set up a sukkah after Yom Kippur? To tell you that on Rosh Hashanah, the Holy One, blessed be He, sits in judgment over the inhabitants of the world, and on Yom Kippur He seals the verdict. Now perhaps Jews have been condemned to go into exile? Hence they build a sukkah, thus exiling themselves from their homes, and the Holy One, blessed be He, considers it like exile" (Yalkut Emor).

Consequently, if we set up the sukkah before Yom Kippur, how can it replace the exile that was called for on Yom Kippur?

In the book Sha'arei Teshuvah, the author rejects this opinion, stating that it is simply based on a particular text. What exile really means is not to set up the sukkah, but rather to dwell in it. Thus on the contrary, it is better to set it up as early as possible, for this mitzvah immediately adds to our merits!

In his book Birkei Yosef, the Chida suggests a compromise, proposing that people who are very meticulous with mitzvot can set up the walls of the sukkah and the pillars for the roof before Yom Kippur. At the end of Yom Kippur, they can place schach on the roof, if not entirely, then at least partially.

Along the same lines, in the book Yaffe LaLev we read: "My eyes have seen many strict people conduct themselves in this way. This is what we usually do, and it is a good custom."

The Blessing for the Sukkah

We do not recite a blessing when setting up the sukkah, whether a person is doing it himself or someone is doing it for him, since one is obligated not just to set up a sukkah, but to dwell in it as well. The Rambam rules, "Whenever the performance of a mitzvah constitutes the completion of one's obligation, he

should recite the blessing before performing it. When, however, there is another commandment that follows the performance of a particular mitzvah, the blessing should not be recited until the other mitzvah is performed. What does this imply? When a person makes a sukkah, a lulav, a shofar, tzitzit, tefillin, or a mezuzah, he should not recite a blessing at the time he made [them], [praising G-d for] 'sanctifying us with Your commandments and commanding us to make a sukkah' or 'a lulav,' or 'to write tefillin,' for there is another commandment that follows this action. When is the blessing recited? When one sits in the sukkah, shakes the lulav, hears the sounding of the shofar..." (Hilchot Berachot 11:8).

On the other hand, the Jerusalem Talmud (cited in Tosafot Sukkah 46a) states that one must recite a blessing upon setting up the sukkah.

Reciting Shecheyanu

It is fitting to recite the Shecheyanu blessing upon setting up a sukkah if we have done it ourselves, states the Shulchan Aruch (641:1). However we rely on the Shecheyanu blessing that we recited over Kiddush on the first evening of Sukkot.

If someone has recited Shecheyanu upon setting up the sukkah, the Pri Megadim asks if he should repeat it during Kiddush. In his book Birkei Yosef, the Chida asks the very same question, and writes that according to the opinion of the Tosafot, the Rosh, and the Ran, we do not repeat the blessing. However according to the Rambam, the Ramban, and the Ritba, we repeat it. The Chida interprets this to mean that if there is a doubt, we must not repeat it over Kiddush, for we know that we must be lenient whenever we have a doubt in regards to a blessing.

Sukkah and Mezuzah

The sukkah is a temporary dwelling, not a house. Hence the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 286:1) believes that it does not require a mezuzah, as it is written: "You shall...write them upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates (Devarim 6:7-9) – "your house" being a permanent dwelling, not a temporary one.

Yet sometimes, it may be necessary to place a mezuzah on a sukkah. When does this happen?

It happens when there are two rooms, one inside the other, and a person makes a sukkah in one of them. When one goes from one room to the sukkah, the opening of the sukkah must have a mezuzah – not because of the sukkah itself, but because of the adjoining room (Mishnah Berurah 626:21).

The poskim discuss the duty to affix a mezuzah in a room that had previously been lived in, but whose walls have since been removed and is now covered by kosher schach for the seven days of the festival. Is it necessary for this room to have a mezuzah during the seven days of the festival?

If we say that it is exempt from having a mezuzah, then does it become necessary to remove it after the festival, when the room's regular walls have been restored, and then to reattach it, due to the principle that we must "make" – meaning that we cannot take it from something already made? In practice, the book Misgeret HaShulchan states that the custom is not to remove the mezuzah after the festival in order to reattach it afterwards. We may possibly rely on a second reason, given in Arba'a Turei Even, which is that it does not follow from the principle that we must "make," rather than taking it already made, since from the outset the mezuzah had been legitimately placed in a room that required one.

Guard Your Tongue

Do Not Judge Unfavorably

Even if it is extremely likely that someone is guilty, it is very good to consider that there is some doubt as to his guilt, and therefore not to judge him unfavorably. Likewise if someone is probably innocent, it is obviously forbidden to judge him unfavorably. If a person nevertheless judges him unfavorably, and this causes people to speak about him disparagingly, then besides the fact that such a person has transgressed, "with righteousness shall you judge your fellow" [Vayikra 19:15], he has also transgressed the prohibition against speaking Lashon Harah. – Chafetz Chaim

Come, O Ushpizin!

The ancient splendor of Israel resides in the sukkot of the Jewish people when the holy Patriarchs, the shepherds of Israel – known as the Ushpizin – descend into the sukkah and spread their glory over all that surrounds them. The custom of inviting the Ushpizin into the sukkah is not mentioned in the books of the early poskim, and even the Shulchan Aruch does not mention it. Rabbi Moshe Ben Machir, the author of Seder HaYom, is the first to mention this custom as part of his advice on proper conduct: “Everyone should invite a poor person to his table, every day, and treat him as if one the Patriarchs were his guest. Whoever can host seven poor people every day will obviously be blessed. If he does not invite them to his own table, he should send food to their homes, for that is what they deserve.”

The book Chemdat Yamim recounts the story of a tzaddik who shared his food with wise and renowned men. When a beggar came by, the tzaddik greatly rejoiced and sat him at the head of his table, exclaiming with joy: “I’m happy to have the merit of offering you the place of our father Abraham in his sukkah.” Not long afterwards, he had a dream in which he was inundated with problems and facing a grave danger. All of a sudden, our father Abraham personally came and rescued him. Ever since that time, he began organizing a special meal for the needy, at his own expense, on each day of the festival.

The author of Yesod VeShoresh HaAvodah beautifully praises those who welcome guests into their sukkah: “Our saintly forefathers find refuge with him in the sukkah, rejoicing with him when he shares his bread with the homeless and needy, with honorable men who study Torah, and with the desperate poor.”

Rabbi Alexander Ziskind of Horodna, the author of Yesod VeShoresh HaAvodah, even instituted a special prayer for inviting the Ushpizin into the sukkah: “I formulated a short prayer for inviting the Ushpizin, one that a person should say upon entering the sukkah for an evening or afternoon meal. He should recite it each day, either for the evening or afternoon meal. He should first summon the host and then include the six other Ushpizin.”

We can rely on this advice from Rabbi Alexander, who was also inspired by the Zohar: “If we do not specifically invite the Ushpizin, they will not enter the sukkah of even a great tzaddik! We should invite and address them individually, each by name.”

The book Mateh Ephraim (621) describes how to organize the first evening of the festival, highlighting the custom of inviting the holy Ushpizin into the sukkah: “Virtuous men enter the sukkah and declare, ‘Today is a festival; in sukkot shall you dwell.... Come, O Ushpizin!’ [according to prayer book] with joy and pleasant voice.”

Likewise, the Shelah insists that one must invite the Ushpizin to enter the sukkah, never counting on the fact that they will do so without an invitation: “Upon entering the sukkah, we must explicitly invite these tzaddikim to come, for their spiritual presence, which completely surrounds us, is our glory. This is what Rav Hamnuna did.”

The Shelah continues: “To summarize. We must invite the tzaddikim associated with that day, and then give their place to the poor who are seated around our table. If they are not at our own table, we should send food to their homes, for that is what they deserve.” Finally, as the Zohar mentions: “Each person must display a friendly face to the Ushpizin who reside with him.” Hence it is forbidden to be sad, and even worse to be angry!

In regards to this subject, we should mention that offering a warm welcome to guests is a good segula for never lacking anything. The Sefat Emet explains the teaching of our Sages that “during sukkot we are judged upon water” (see Rosh Hashanah 16a). He states that water is a reference to subsistence, and that welcoming guests is particularly significant during Sukkot, which is a time of joy.

During this time of joy, Hashem rejoices, so to speak, in preparing food for His creatures. He says, “Behold, I have given you...every green herb” [Bereshith 1:29-30], this language always signifying joy. This teaches us to welcome guests with a friendly face and to give tzeddakah with joy. Hence Hashem established the moment to determine our subsistence for the entire year during our time of joy.

How Good is Their Lot!

The obligation to share our festival meals with the poor and needy has been transmitted to us in every generation by the words of the Sages of Israel. In his book Avodat Hakodesh, the Chida brings this subject to our attention by stating: “We must put an effort into sharing our meals with the needy. In fact the obligation to feed the poor on every festival is added to the obligation of doing so in honor of the Ushpizin. Whoever fails in this regard commits a grave sin.”

The gaon Rabbi Haim Faladji of Izmir also encourages us to act in this way, stating: “Great is the lot of one who feeds the poor and guests at his table on this holy festival,” as well as, “Great is the sin of one who does not have the poor or guests at his table. The seven Ushpizin curse him! Whoever does not have an opportunity to invite them should at least send them a meal and declare, ‘Let this portion of our meal be that of the Ushpizin, who will take their place in our sukkah.’ In our city of Izmir, two family leaders and their father normally prepare tables for the needy and guests during the first two nights of Sukkot. How good is their lot! May we continue to act as such for the generations to come!”

No Stranger Can Take His Place

Various beautiful customs have been preserved among Jewish communities in honor of the Ushpizin. Holy books (including Ohr Tzaddikim, Shaarei Teshuvah and Chida) recount that it is good to light seven candles in the sukkah, each corresponding to the seven tzaddikim who come and dwell there.

Rabbi Haim Faladji adopted this practice and added, “Whoever does not have suitable candles shall place seven wicks himself, despite the fact that on the other festivals we usually light five, corresponding to the number of times we ascend to the Torah.”

In Moroccan communities, including Fez, people have adopted the custom of hanging a small chair from one of the walls of the sukkah, calling it Eliyahu Hanavi’s chair.

They decorate this chair with colored fabric and affix holy books used during the festival of Sukkot, such as a Machzor, the book Chemed Elokim, a collection of piyutim, and other works. Other communities have adopted the custom of having a chair in the sukkah in honor of the Ushpizin. They place this chair in a corner of the sukkah, and on it they put Torah books that are studied during the festival.

Finally, we should point out that the book Keter Shem Tov warns not to use this chair, which has been reserved for the Ushpizin, due to our faith and the confidence we have in the coming of Mashiach, for whom “no stranger can take his place.”

The Secrets of the Four Species

“Innumerable are the secrets of the lulav and the four species, and how I cherish them! Happy is the pure of heart, one who directs his thoughts to the greatest secrets of the mitzvot.”

All My Bones Shall Say

In regards to the four species, it should be noted that they allude to the four parts of the body that are the basis for action, be it to perform mitzvot or commit sins. These consist of the eyes, the heart, the lips (since many mitzvot, as well as sins, depend on speech) and the spinal cord, which is the literal backbone of the body, being empowered by the brain. The etrog resembles the heart, the palm branch resembles the spine, the myrtle resembles the eyes, and the willow resembles the lips.

All this means that when we commit a sin with these four body parts, we will be redeemed by these four species, for each sin finds redemption when we fulfill the corresponding mitzvah.

Regarding this mitzvah, Midrash Tanhuma states: “All my bones shall say, ‘Hashem, who is like You?’” [Tehillim 35:10]. – Kad HaKemach

Physical and Spiritual Joy

The reason for this mitzvah, first and foremost, is because the festival of Sukkot is dedicated to the harvest, and because it is a time of joy. As a result, the Holy One, blessed be He, wants us to merit complete joy, both physical and spiritual, when we recall His mitzvot.

He chose the four species that resemble main features of the human body, for serving Hashem depends on thought, speech and deed.

The etrog resembles the heart, upon which all thoughts depend. The leaves of the willow are similar to the lips, from which speech originates. The palm tree resembles the spine, which represents the entire body. When a person looks at the four species, he readies his thoughts to serve G-d, he does not grow proud of his abundant harvest, and his heart is not led astray by following his eyes. – The Radbaz, Ta’amei HaMitzvot

Individual Providence

I have also heard that every tree and plant has an angel that watches over it and says, “Grow!” In regards to the four species, however, Hashem did not designate an angel over them. He strikes and oversees them Himself, so to speak, to ensure that they grow.

This is why He ordered us to take these species during the festival of Sukkot, to show everyone that Jews are G-d’s people, that they are in His hands, and that they need not fear any other created being.

Even the Satan has no power over them, for they are marked with the sign of the King. – Seder HaYom

The Lulav and the Blessing

It is written, “If one sees myrtle in his dream, he will have good luck with his property, and if he has no property he will inherit some from elsewhere. ... If one sees citron [hadar] in his dream, he is honoured [hadar] in the sight of his Maker, since it says: ‘The fruit of a citron tree, the branches of date palms’ [Vayikra 23:40]. If one sees a palm branch in a dream, he is single-hearted in devotion to his Father in Heaven” (Berachot 57a).

Rabbi Klonimus said that the lulav should have no less than 60 leaves, corresponding to the blessing of the Kohanim, which contains 60 letters. In fact the lulav comes for the blessing, as our Sages have taught: These species win over the Creator in regards to water (during Sukkot, we are judged on the water that we will have throughout the year).

– Rashi, Sefer HaPardes

The Tree of Life

The phrase pri etz hadar (“the fruit of hadar” [Vayikra 23:40]) has the same numerical value, including one for each word, as the term etrogim.

The expression pri etz appears twice in the Torah: asher bo pri etz (in the description of Creation) and pri etz hadar (in the description of the etrog). This alludes to what our Sages have said: The fruit that Adam ate was an etrog.

The term avot (myrtle) is written without a vav (numerical value: six) because of the six things that can render it impure: A dry branch, having been stolen, originating from an asherah (idolatrous object), coming from a village that has been excommunicated (for idolatry), the end of which has been cut, and which belongs to an idolater.

The word lulav has the same numerical value as the term chaim (“life”), which is why a dry branch cannot be used. – Baal HaTurim

All 613 Mitzvot

The Midrash states that anyone who fulfills the mitzvah of the etrog with three species, it is as though he has fulfilled all the mitzvot. The reason is because the terms etrog and gimel minim (the three other species) have a numerical value of 613. – Abudraham

A Torah of Life

The term lulav has the same numerical value as lo lev (spelled lamed vav lamed beit).

This corresponds to the 36 (lamed vav) hidden tzaddikim in each generation, as well as the 36 tractates of the Gemara.

Furthermore, lamed beit refers to the Torah, which starts with a beit and ends with a lamed.

The term lulav has the same numerical value as chaim (“life”), a reference to the Torah. – Respona of the Maharil

In the Light of the Parsha

The Rema writes, “Those who are vigilant begin building their sukkah as soon as Yom Kippur ends, in order to proceed from one mitzvah to another” (Orach Chaim 624:5). I believe we may also say that on Yom Kippur, faith is increased in the heart of man because he has confessed before the King of kings and asked for forgiveness for all his sins. Now it is a mitzvah to combine faith with the study of Torah and the performance of mitzvot, the latter two being found in the mitzvah of sukkah – Torah study and mitzvot performance together. In what way? Naturally there is the mitzvah, but how does it comprise Torah study as well? It is because the sukkah resembles the Temple that we made as an abode for the Shechinah. King Solomon inaugurated the Temple during Sukkot, although its construction was completed in the month of Cheshvan (Pesikta Rabbati 6). He nevertheless inaugurated it in the month of Tishri, immediately following Yom Kippur, in order to tell us that everyone must do the same – to proceed to Torah study and mitzvot performance. In fact faith alone cannot endure if it is not accompanied by Torah, and there is only Torah study when a person exiles himself from one place to another, as it is said: “Exile yourself to a place of Torah” (Pirkei Avot 4:14). During the festival of Sukkot, each person leaves his home and enters a sukkah, which is considered as going into exile.

In the Aggadah our Sages say, “Why do we make a sukkah after Yom Kippur? In order to tell you that on Rosh Hashanah, Hashem judges all the inhabitants of the world and seals the verdict on Yom Kippur. Perhaps the Children of Israel were condemned to go into exile? In this way, they make a sukkah and are exiled from their homes to the sukkah, and Hashem considers them to have been exiled to Babylon” (Pesikta D’Rav Kahana 2). Because a person exiles himself from his home and enters his sukkah, which is like a Beit HaMidrash, he is forgiven.