



A Wonderful Insight from the Arizal

HKB”H Hugs Yisrael inside the Succah with His Right Arm that Is Extended to Motivate Us to Do Teshuvah from Ahavah

In honor of the auspiciously approaching festival of Succos, we will explore a passage from the Zohar hakadosh in the Raiya Mehemna (Emor 100b). Many have the custom to recite this passage before the blowing of the shofar. It states that Eisav is the prosecutor who constantly pursues the descendants of Yaakov—i.e., Yisrael—with accusations. This is implied by the following passuk (Bereishis 27, 41): **”ויעקב נסע סוכותה ויבן לו בית”**—**Eisav hated Yaakov**. During the period extending from Rosh HaShanah to Yom Kippur, Yaakov flees and seeks refuge from Eisav by means of teshuvah. He continues these efforts until Yom Kippur; then Yaakov appeases Eisav by sending him the *“sa’ir la’azazel”* as a peace-offering—so that he will go away and desist with his defamatory claims against Yisrael.

At the time of the Ne’ilah service, the following occurs (ibid. 33, 16): **”ויעקב נסע סוכותה ויבן לו בית”**—Eisav, Yisrael’s perennial prosecutor, departs, and HKB”H pardons Yisrael for their transgressions. In the aftermath, HKB”H wishes to rejoice with His children. This is expressed by the following passuk (ibid. 17): **”ויעקב נסע סוכותה ויבן לו בית”**—**Yaakov journeyed to Succos and built himself a house**. This passuk alludes to the mitzvah of succah. In the merit of dwelling in Succos, Yisrael are saved from the prosecutor, and HKB”H celebrates with His children.

We learn from this Zohar that in the merit of dwelling in the succah, Yisrael are spared. Additionally, we learn from the Raiyah Mehemnah (Pinchas 256a) that dwelling in the succah is tantamount to dwelling under the protective wings

of the Shechinah: **”השכינה היא סוכה מגינה עליהם ומורשת כנפיה עליהם—the Shechinah is a succah protecting them; she spreads her wings over them like a mother over her children**. In a similar vein, the Bnei Yissaschar writes (Tishrei 10, 7) in the name of the Arizal that the succah constitutes an *“ohr meikif”*—a surrounding light—that protects those sitting inside it.

Nevertheless, this raises a baffling question. The Torah states explicitly (Vayikra 16, 30): **”כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם לטהר: אתכם מכל חטאתיכם לפני ה’ תטהרו”**—**for on this day He shall provide atonement for you to purify you from all your sins; before Hashem shall you be purified**. Yet, according to the Zohar hakadosh just quoted, the prosecutor departs towards the end of Yom Kippur: **”On that day, Eisav continues on his way.” When? During Ne’ilah**. So, why do Yisrael still require protection from the prosecutor in the form of the succah?

The Benefits of Teshuvah Motivated by Ahavah

We will begin our discussion with a marvelous chiddush from the Kedushas Levi (Vayeilech). He explains the elucidation of Chazal in the Midrash Tanchuma (Emor 22) related to a passuk about Chag HaSuccos (Vayikra 23, 40): **”ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון, וכי ראשון הוא והלא ט”ו יום הוא, ואת”**—**אמרת ביום הראשון, אלא ראשון הוא לחשבון עוונות”**. It states: **“You shall take for yourselves (the four species) on the first day.” Why does the passuk call it “the first day” when it is actually the fifteenth day (of Tishrei)?** The Midrash

answers: **It means that it is the first day of accountability for transgressions.**

He explains in his own inimitable, sacred way that there are two types of teshuvah. On the days from Rosh HaShanah to Yom Kippur, all Jews perform teshuvah, but it is primarily teshuvah motivated by fear—"yirah." They are afraid, because they are being judged by the Almighty. After the High Holidays—Yamim Nora'im—during which HKB"H mercifully forgave and pardoned all of Yisrael's transgressions, comes the festival of Succos—"the time of our rejoicing." We celebrate this festival by dwelling in the succah and taking the four species—"arba minim." Regarding the latter mitzvah, the passuk says (ibid.): **וְשִׂמְחֶתֶם לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים—****you shall rejoice before Hashem, your G-d, for seven days.** This constitutes a different type of teshuvah; it is teshuvah stemming from "ahavah"—love of the Almighty—and spiritual elevation.

The Gemara (Yoma 86b) teaches us that teshuvah motivated by "yirah" has the power to transform the status of deliberate transgressions into accidental, inadvertent transgressions. In contrast, teshuvah stemming from "ahavah" has the power to transform the status of deliberate transgressions into virtues. Hence, during the Yamim Nora'im, when Yisrael's teshuvah is primarily motivated by "yirah," it is not yet the best time to reckon their transgressions, since they have not been transformed into virtues, yet. On Chag HaSuccos, however, when Yisrael's teshuvah stems from "ahavah," which transforms their deliberate transgressions into virtues, it is the most favorable time for reckoning Yisrael's transgression--**ראשון לחשבון עוונות**. For, now, HKB"H can judge Yisrael more favorably and increase their reward by reckoning past transgressions as virtues. This is the gist of his sacred remarks.

The Two Aspects of "דין וחשבון"

Two of our brilliant scholars—the Yeshuot Yaakov (O.C. 581, 4) and the Beis Ephraim (Introduction to the O.C.)—expand on the concept of the Kedushas Levi. They focus on the terminology of the Midrash: **"ראשון לחשבון עוונות"** by referring to the following Mishnah (Avos 3, 1): **ולפני מי אתה—****and before Whom you are destined to give account and reckoning.**

The Gra of Vilna, ztz"l addresses the seemingly redundant language of **"דין וחשבון"**—**account and reckoning**. He explains that when a person commits an aveirah, chas v'shalom, two things are taken into consideration: (1) the actual transgression violating the will and command of Hashem, and (2) the positive deed or mitzvah that could have been performed at that time. This then is the way to interpret the Mishnah: **"And before Whom you are destined to give account and reckoning"**—**"din,"** the accountability for the actual aveirah, and **"cheshbon,"** the reckoning for the missed opportunity to perform a mitzvah.

Analyzed from this perspective, consider teshuvah based on "yirah." While it is true that the person will no longer be punished for the **"din,"** for the actual aveirah, since it has been transformed into an inadvertent transgression; nevertheless, he still needs to atone for the **"cheshbon,"** the good deed or mitzvah that could have been performed at that time. Therefore, it is imperative to strive to perform teshuvah based on "ahavah," in order to transform the deliberate transgressions into virtues. Thus, both the **"din"** and the **"cheshbon"** are taken care of, because it is viewed as if a virtuous deed was indeed performed.

We can now apply this to the elucidation in the Midrash: **"ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון, ראשון לחשבון עוונות"**. By performing the mitzvos on the first day of Succos, Jews are performing teshuvah based on "ahavah," which transforms all of their transgressions into virtues. Thus, they are not only making amends for the **"din"** of the transgressions but also for the **"cheshbon."**

Even Inadvertent Sins Require Teshuvah

Following this line of reasoning, we will now explain why Yisrael still need protection from the prosecutor even after Yom Kippur—which HKB"H provides them by means of the succah. It is a well-known principle that even aveiros due to coercion, and all the more so accidental aveiros, still require tikun via teshuvah. Even though there is no punishment for this type of aveirah; nevertheless, one aveirah leads to another. Hence, if one does not perform teshuvah even for an inadvertent sin, it is liable to lead to other aveiros, chas v'shalom, including more serious, intentional ones.

Here is a alarming passage concerning this matter in the Midrash Tanchuma (Vayikra 6) related to the passuk (Vayikra 4, 2): **נפש כי תחטא בשגגה מכל מצוות ה' אשר לא תעשינה**—**if a person sins unintentionally from among all the mitzvos of Hashem that may not be done, and he commits from one of them:**

That which Scripture stated (Mishlei 19, 2): “Also, a soul without knowledge is not good; and one who hastens with the feet is a sinner,” indicates that when someone sins, even unintentionally, it is not a good omen for him . . . Our masters have taught (Avos 4,2): “One mitzvah leads to another, and one aveirah leads to another.” A person should not worry about a sin which he commits inadvertently; but rather about the fact that an opening has been made for him to sin again, either unintentionally or even deliberately. Moreover, one should not rejoice over a mitzvah which comes to him, but rather over the many mitzvos that are going to come to him. Therefore, if one has sinned unwittingly, this does not bode well for him, as stated, “Also, a soul without knowledge is not good.” How much more so if he sins deliberately! About him it has been stated: “And one who hastens with the feet is a sinner.”

Let us now introduce an amazing interpretation from the holy master, the Mahari of Belz, zy”a, related to the following pesukim (Chabakuk 3, 1): **תפלה לחבקוק הנביא על שגיונות. ה' שמעתי: ה' שמעך יראתי, ה' פעלך בקרב שנים חיהו, בקרב שנים תודיע.** **A prayer of Chabakuk the prophet for erroneous utterances: O Hashem, I have heard Your news (of impending galus); I was afraid. O Hashem, in the midst of the years, keep Your accomplishment alive; in the midst of the years, make it known.** According to the Zohar hakadosh (Beshalach 44a), Chabakuk was the son of the Shunammite woman, who was revived by Elisha. Since he had already died and gone to the world above, he had witnessed and became aware of the damage caused to a being from all transgressions—both deliberate and unintentional.

This is what prompted him to formulate this tefilah after he was revived: **“A prayer of Chabakuk the prophet for erroneous utterances.”** He is expressing remorse for his previous errors and lack of understanding. **“O Hashem, I**

have heard Your news” while I was in the world above, so I am now afraid and concerned about the damage done to the being and soul even from unintentional transgressions. Hence, he continues: **“O Hashem, in the midst of the years, keep Your accomplishment alive; in the midst of the years, make it known”**—so that while a person is still alive in Olam HaZeh, make him aware of all that he has to make amends for, since it is not possible to do so in Olam HaBa.

This illuminates for us the words of the Raiya Mehemna. Yes, it is true that all the transgressions of the people of Yisrael are forgiven on Yom Kippur and the Satan is not active on this holy day. However, since the teshuvah they performed during the Days of Judgment were motivated by “yirah,” their deliberate transgressions were only transformed into unintentional transgressions. As such, there is still a real concern that one transgression will lead to another transgression. Therefore, the Satan is aroused immediately after Yom Kippur to take advantage of this opportunity to cause Yisrael to sin.

It is for this reason that the Zohar hakadosh asserts that HKB”H wishes to rejoice with His children, so that they will perform teshuvah based on “ahavah.” By dwelling in the succah, they are protected and saved from the prosecutor, because their transgressions have now been transformed into virtues. As such, there is no longer a concern of “aveirah goreret aveirah.”

An Amazing Insight from the Arizal in the Succah HKB”H Embraces Us with His Right Arm

It is with immense pleasure that we will now explore together the wondrous ways of Hashem. By means of dwelling in the succah, HKB”H inspires His children Yisrael to perform teshuvah stemming from “ahavah.” Let us refer to the teachings of our master, the Arizal. In Sha’ar HaKavanos (Succos, Drush 4), he points out a marvelous allusion with regards to the walls of the succah. According to the halachah as it appears in the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 630, 2), based on what we are taught in the Gemara (Succah 6b), a kosher succah does not require four complete walls. It suffices if a succah has **שתיים כהלכתן ושלישית אפילו טפח**—**two full walls and a third wall measuring at least a hand’s-breadth.**

The Arizal refers to a passuk in Shir HaShirim (2, 6): **“וימינו תחבקני”—let His right arm hug (envelop) me.** He explains that the arm is made up of three parts: the upper arm (between the shoulder and the elbow), the lower arm (between the elbow and the wrist), and the hand with its five fingers. In a sense, the configuration of the walls of a succah resembles a human arm. The full length upper and lower arms correspond to the **“two full walls,”** while the smaller hand corresponds to the third wall, which need only be **“a hand’s breadth.”**

Now, when a father hugs his beloved son with his right arm, he does so with the entire arm extending from his shoulder to the tips of his fingers. It is precisely in this manner that HKB”H hugs us when we are inside the succah. In other words, the configuration of the succah alludes magnificently to the **“ohr meikif”**—the surrounding light—which HKB”H uses to hug His children with His right arm in keeping with the notion of **“וימינו תחבקני”**.

Mirroring Hashem’s Love

Continuing on this sacred pilgrimage, we will now endeavor to explain how Yisrael are inspired to perform teshuvah based on **“ahavah”** on Chag HaSuccos. As brought down in our sacred sefarim, the great Rabbi Akiva Eiger, ztz”l (whose yahrzeit falls between Yom Kippur and Succos on the thirteenth of Tishrei), delved into the mitzvah of (Devarim 6, 5): **“ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך”—you shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all of your heart.** The commentaries are perplexed by this mitzvah. How can a person be commanded to love HKB”H? After all, love is an emotion related to the heart, it cannot be demanded.

He answers this question by quoting the words of the wisest of all men (Mishlei 27, 9): **“כמים הפנים לפנים כן לב האדם”—as water reflects a face back to a face, so a man’s heart is reflected back to him by another.** He states that when a person loves his fellow man, it elicits reciprocal feelings from the other person—just like the image reflected by the water. Now, we have a passuk that states explicitly (Malachi 1, 2): **“אהבתי אתכם אמר ה'”—“I loved you,” says Hashem.** Thus, it stands to reason that this would elicit in us a reciprocal love for Hashem.

However, all the foolish, nonsensical matters of Olam HaZeh that a person pursues act as a barrier preventing this natural, reciprocal love in a Jew’s heart from expressing itself and becoming a reality. Hence, the Torah commands us (Devarim 6, 5): **“ואהבת את ה' אלקיך”—you shall love Hashem, your G-d.** A Jew is commanded to remove all the factors that inhibit him from exhibiting the tremendous love in his heart for Hashem. Once these barriers are removed, our tremendous love of Hashem will be exhibited naturally and spontaneously.

Based on this concept, Rabbi Akiva Eiger goes onto explain the juxtaposition of the conclusion of the berachah just prior to Krias Shema: **“הבוחר בעמו ישראל באהבה”—Who chooses His people Yisrael with “ahavah” (lovingly)—**with the first passage of Krias Shema: **“ואהבת את ה' אלקיך”—you shall love Hashem, your G-d.** Since HKB”H chooses us with **“ahavah,”** we are capable of loving Him with ease. Therefore, it is quite reasonable to command us to fulfill the mitzvah of: **“ואהבת את ה' אלקיך.”** This teaches us a vital principle. When HKB”H reveals his great love to us, it is much easier for us to reveal and express our love for Him in return—like the reflection of one’s face in the water.

We can now explain how we are able to perform teshuvah based on **“ahavah”** on Chag HaSuccos. On Yom Kippur, we are absolved of our wrongdoings; this removes the barriers separating us from our Heavenly Father. This qualifies us to sit in the succah, where we are embraced by HKB”H’s right arm, so to speak. In this manner, He expresses His great love for Yisrael. This elicits our reciprocal love for Him—like a reflection in water—stimulating us to perform teshuvah from **“ahavah”** that transforms deliberate transgressions into virtues.

This provides us with a beautiful interpretation of the formula we recite in the Ne’ilah service, which seems somewhat redundant: **“אתה נותן יד לפושעים וימינך פשוטה לקבל”—You offer a hand to wrongdoers, and Your right hand is extended to receive those who return** (who perform teshuvah). **“You offer a hand to wrongdoers”** implies that HKB”H inspires sinners on Yom Kippur to at least perform teshuvah from **“yirah”**; **“and Your right hand is extended to receive those who return”** refers to Chag HaSuccos, when HKB”H embraces Yisrael inside the succah

with a right-handed hug, so to speak, to inspire them to perform teshuvah from “ahavah”—thereby transforming their deliberate transgressions into virtues.

We will now add a fascinating tidbit concerning **Simchas Beis HaSho'eivah**—the joyous celebration accompanying the drawing of the water to be poured on the mizbeiach during the festival of Succos. In the Mishnah (Succah 51a), Chazal describe this simchah in superlative terms: **מי שלא ראה שמחת בית השואבה לא ראה שמחה מימיו**—**whoever did not see the Simchas Beis HaSho'eivah never saw rejoicing in his life**. Aside from the profound, esoteric significance of the sprinkling of the water, it also alludes to the deep love HKB”H demonstrates for Yisrael on Chag HaSuccos. As we have learned, Yisrael reciprocate by performing heartfelt teshuvah and demonstrating their love of Hashem in return, in keeping with the notion of: **כמים הפנים לפנים**—which can also be viewed as an allusion to the sprinkling of the water.

The Opening in the Left Leg of the Letter “Hei” Is for Penitents

At this point, we invite our esteemed readers to enjoy the wonders of the Torah with us. Based on the Arizal’s notion—that HKB”H hugs us with His right arm in the succah—I can put to rest a difficult issue that has bothered me for many years. It concerns an exposition in the Gemara (Menachos 29b) related to a passuk toward the end of the narrative of the creation (Bereishis 2, 4): **אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם**, **אל תקרי בהבראם אלא בה”י בראם**. The passuk states: **“These are the generations of the heavens and the earth בהבראם”**. **Do not read the word as it is actually written—בהבראם—but rather as בה’ בראם** (indicating that the heavens and the earth were created with the letter “hei”).

The Gemara inquires: **And why was Olam HaZeh created with the letter “hei”?** Because it resembles a pavilion (Rashi: it is open underneath); so that anyone who wishes to leave (go astray) can leave (to lead a life of sin). Then the Gemara asks: **And for what reason is the left leg of the “hei” hanging** (i.e., it is not connected to the top of the “hei”)? **So that if he performs teshuvah, they can bring him back in** (through the upper opening between the suspended leg and the top of the “hei”).

Let us suggest that this is conveyed by the passuk (Shir HaShirim 5, 2): **“קול דודי דופק פתחי לי”**—**My Beloved knocks! He said, “Open your heart to Me.”** They expound on this passuk in the Midrash Rabbah: **אמר הקב”ה לישראל, בני פתחו לי**—**HKB”H said to Yisrael, “My child, open for Me a single opening of teshuvah like the eye of a needle.”** This teaches us that HKB”H asks us to create a small opening of teshuvah, in the upper part of the letter “hei.” Even though it is an exceedingly small aperture, like the eye of a needle, every individual can enter through it to appease Hashem via teshuvah. We can suggest that this is alluded to by the word **teshuvah--תשובה**. This word can be broken down to **תשובה**, alluding to the fact that the mitzvah of teshuvah is associated with the letter “hei,” which provides a small aperture for penitents to return through.

This, indeed, is extremely surprising, since the opportunity for the sinner to return is through the aperture at the top left side of the letter “hei.” Seemingly, this contradicts the formula we utter in tachanun in Shacharis on Mondays and Thursdays: **נחפשה דרכינו ונחקורה ונשובה אליך, כי ימינך פשוטה לקבל שבים**—**let us examine and scrutinize our ways, and return to You, for Your right hand is extended to accept those who return** (penitents). Similarly, in Ne’ilah, at the conclusion of Yom Kippur, we say: **אתה נותן יד לפושעים וימינך פשוטה לקבל שבים**—**You offer a hand to wrongdoers, and Your right hand is extended to receive those who return**. Both of these statements imply that HKB”H accepts sinners back on the right side, not on the left side.

The Walls of a Succah Form the Letter “Hei”

It appears that we can resolve this difficulty very easily based on what we learned from the Arizal—that while we are inside the succah, HKB”H embraces us with His right arm. Let us also add the sacred comments of the Alshich hakadosh in parshas Emor on the passuk (Vayikra 23, 42): **בסוכות תשבו שבעת ימים**—**you shall dwell in Succos for a seven-day period**. They expound in the Gemara (Succah 2a): **אמרה תורה, כל שבעת הימים צא מדירת קבע ושב בדירת עראי**—**the Torah said: For all seven days you should abandon your permanent dwelling and sit in a temporary dwelling**. The Alshich hakadosh says that we should view

these seven days as representative of the seventy years of a man's life in Olam HaZeh. Our life here is only temporary; it is not permanent.

He adds that this is why HKB"H created the world with the letter "hei"—**נה"י בראם**. It is because the letter "hei" bears a magnificent resemblance to a succah built with the minimum requirements of **two full walls and a third wall measuring at least a hand's-breadth**. Now, the letter "hei" has an intact right side, an intact top, and a short, interrupted left side. Hence, HKB"H created the world with this letter to emphasize that Olam HaZeh is merely a temporary dwelling just like the succah.

Now, we learned from the Arizal that the two intact walls plus the one small, partial wall of the succah

represent HKB"H's embrace. The Alshich hakadosh pointed out that these walls resemble the shape of the letter "hei." If we combine these two ideas, we can comprehend why we say: **"Your right hand is extended to accept those who return (penitents)."**

Indeed, the opening for penitents to reenter is on the left side of the letter "hei." This is because HKB"H is embracing Yisrael with His right arm such that His upper arm is represented by the right side of the "hei," His lower arm is represented by the top of the "hei," while the palm of His hand is represented by the small left side of the "hei." Thus, the reason the opening for teshuvah is located on the left side of the "hei" is because HKB"H embraces us with His right arm, which is represented by the rest of the "hei."



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