

SUCCOS: The Encounter Between Judgment and Joy

How can we rejoice on Succos when Divine judgment, "sealed" on Yom Kippur, is not final until Hoshana Rabba? Based on the writings of Rabbi Zalmen Sorotzkin, the Sutzker Rav, זצ"ל.

THE SEASON OF PARADOX

Of the three major festivals, only Succos has been designated as "The Time of Our Rejoicing." One reason for this is that it is only with regard to Succos that the Torah enjoins us three times to rejoice.¹ The cause for joy seems obvious, for Succos follows immediately after the Days of Awe, when a Jew cleanses himself of sin through intense repentance. Thus, our jubilation at finally being able to serve our Creator uninhibited by the barriers erected by sin. According to the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 30:2), this thought is alluded to in the *mitzva* of *arba minim*, the Four Species, where the spear-like *lulav* held by each Jew represents the triumphant stance of Israel emerging victorious from the judgment of the Days of Awe.

Rabbi Finkelman, who teaches *Gemora* in Yeshiva Tiferes Elimelech in Brooklyn, wrote "Taking Flight With a Mitzva" (JO, Nov. '84) and is author of three books for the Artscroll youth series, including the recently published *Reb Nochem 'ke*.

There is an aspect of Succos, however, that seems to contradict its status as a time for rejoicing. According to the *Mishna* (*Rosh Hashana* 1:2), the world is judged on Succos with regard to its water supply for the entire year ahead. *Zohar* (*Tzav* 31b) goes beyond that, stating that it is actually a time of general judgment, for that which has been decreed on Rosh Hashana and sealed on Yom Kippur is not finalized until Hoshana Rabba, the seventh day of Succos, when the parchments containing the verdicts are entrusted to the *malochim* who "deliver" them. (It is for this reason that people customarily wish each other a *g'mar tov* (literally, "good conclusion") during the period between Yom Kippur and Hoshana Rabba.)

It would seem, then, that the days leading up to Hoshana Rabba would be better spent in remorseful repentance as one awaits the final judgment; rejoicing seems out of place. To put Hoshana Rabba in a wider perspective, some questions must be clarified:

Shouldn't the judgment on Rosh Hashana also include rainfall, as well as grain and fruit harvests, which, according to the *Mishna*, are decided upon at three different junctures through-

Once G-d grants bounty, He will not der

out the year?(2) On the other hand, if in fact all the judgments of the *Yomim Noraim* are not finalized until Hoshana Rabba, why does the *Mishna* single out rainfall as being decided upon during this time? Finally, what is the precise implication of the term *g'mar din*, finalization, which is associated with Hoshana Rabba? Rosh Hashana is understood to be the time of *k'siva*, when the Divine judgments are inscribed in the Heavenly books, while Yom Kippur is the time of *chasima*, when those decrees are sealed. How does the "sealing" of the decree differ from the *g'mar* — the finalization that is associated with Hoshana Rabba? Don't we usually speak of them both in the same breath? — "The decree was signed and sealed," indicated that the decree is irreversible? Obviously, we are in need of a better understanding of the progression of judgment that takes place during this season.

FOR WHOM THE RAINS FALL

During the Days of Awe, the ten days beginning with Rosh Hashana, every Jew is judged in his totality; it is during that time — more than any other — that it is auspicious for man to undergo a spiritual transformation through repentance. If he responds to the call of the season, then a favorable judgment is pronounced — a judgment that encompasses all that affects him in the entire year.

In addition, there are specific judgments throughout the year, such as on Succos, when judgment regarding rainfall is pronounced. This judgment will not hinge on the total spiritual make-up of the individual so much as it relates specifically to his merit in regard to *bitachon* — that is, his trust in G-d as Provider of all sustenance, and his performance of the *mitzvos hachag* that are related to this judgment (as will be detailed below).(3)

This specific judgment can indirectly affect the judgments of the previous days. For, if on Hoshana Rabba a Jew is found deserving of blessings of bounty, then the judgment of life and death can be altered for the better, as is demonstrated by the following episode recorded in the *Gemora* (*Ta'anis* 8a):

In the days of Rav Shmuel bar Nachmeini both a famine and a deadly plague struck simultaneously. The Sages pondered: How shall we direct our prayers? It is improper to pray for two things at once (when the requests are for *matanos chinam*, undeserved gifts, as was the case here in the Sages' opinion — *Iyun Yaakov*, *ibid.*). To request that the famine end would leave them facing decimation by plague. There was no choice, they felt, but to pray that the plague end and bear the ravages of famine (which, while devastating, are less severe than those of a plague — *Maharsha*, *ibid.*).

Rav Shmuel bar Nachmeini, however, disagreed. He said that if prayers for the famine's end would be accepted, then the result would be that the plague, too, would cease. "...for when G-d bestows bounty on people, He bestows it on the living, not on the dead, as is written in *Tehillim* (145,16): 'You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.'" When G-d grants a blessing, He also provides all that is necessary for the benefits of that blessing to be realized: if the people have bounty, they will also live to enjoy it.



TWO HOLIDAYS, TWO APPROACHES

When G-d grants life on Rosh Hashana, then, He may also bestow a person the blessings of rain and sustenance; and His blessings of sustenance on Succos can bring with them life itself. The ways to achieve these blessings on these two holidays differ. The days when our requests are summed up by the plea "And inscribe for a good life all the children of Your covenant!" we immerse ourselves in soul-searching and introspection, and approach the moment of reckoning in awe and fear.

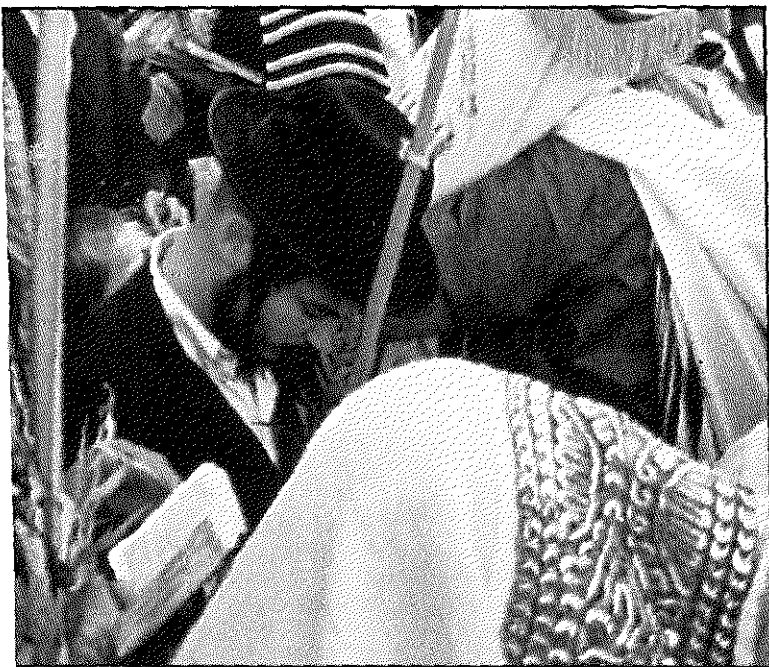
When the shofar blast sounds at the conclusion of *Ne'ila*, signaling the return of the *Shechina* to its Heavenly abode and closing of the Heavenly Gates, the mood immediately changes. As the Midrash states, a Jew should emerge from Yom Kippur joyful and confident that his prayers have been accepted and that he has been inscribed for a good life. "Go, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a glad heart," a Heavenly voice proclaims," for G-d has already approved your deeds" (*Kohelles* 9:7).

The days that follow are days of repentance in preparation for the water judgment, but they encompass a repentance that flows from the joy of our having completed Yom Kippur purified, achieving a new closeness with G-d. With joy we declare our faith and trust in the Provider of all sustenance, so that concerning us will be applied the timeless words of the prophet, "Blessed is the man who trusts in G-d" (17:7).

This new order of repentance, while a direct result of the previous order, is on a higher plane — that of love; for our Sages teach (*Yoma* 86b) that repentance motivated by awe can transform intentional sins into unintentional ones, while repentance that grows from love of G-d transforms intentional sins into meritorious deeds. In this way, too, one can merit during the new period of judgment that which he did not deserve previously.

It is thus that on Succos a Jew has, in effect, two avenues available to him by which he can overturn any harsh decrees;

us the year of life in which to enjoy it.



he can be granted life as an outgrowth of meriting the blessing of rain and contentment; and he can attain the heights of *teshuva me'ahava* — repentance that comes from love — through which any and all harsh decrees are rescinded.

An allusion to this new order of repentance might be found in the Torah itself. In commanding us to fulfill the *mitzva* of *arba minim*, the Torah states (*Vayikra* 23:40), "And you shall take for yourselves on the first day (of the festival) the fruit of a beautiful tree...." (*Midrash Tanchuma* *ibid.*) questions the use of the term "first day" as opposed to "fifteenth of the month" to indicate when the *mitzva* should be performed. (4) "First day" may be an allusion to the new order of repentance mentioned: (5) the beginning of Succos marks the "first day" of this order.

The Mishna in *Rosh Hashana* speaks of the specific judgment regarding rainfall on Succos; it makes no mention of general judgment, for the primary period for this has already ended with Yom Kippur when the decree had, indeed, been signed, so to speak. Then, each Jew came forth with remorse and confession, and having "rested his case," judgment was passed. The *chasima* is final — as far as that order of repentance is concerned. But the angels' delivery of the decrees is delayed, for there is a possibility that it will be superseded by a new judgment based on the considerations of *bitachon* and *ahava* — trust in G-d and love for Him.

THE MITZVOS OF SUCCOS — TOOLS OF REPENTANCE

The primary tools in this new order of repentance are the *mitzvos* that are uniquely associated with Succos: *succa*, *arba minim*, and rejoicing, which are mentioned specifically in the Torah; and the water libations and *arava*-circuits, (6) which were transmitted to Moshe at Sinai. Through these *mitzvos*, a Jew can tilt the scales of judgment

in his favor, as is alluded to in the Mishna (*Succa* 2:9). There, our performance of *mitzvos Succa* is likened to a servant diluting strong wine with water to suit his master's taste. The Vilna Gaon (*Kol Eliyahu, Emor*) explains that in the allegorical terminology of *Kabbala*, wine represents harsh judgment, while water represents mercy. Any harsh judgments that may have been decreed upon a Jew can be diluted with tempering mercy through his performance of the *mitzvos* of the festival.

A closer look at these *mitzvos* reveals that they are particularly auspicious for removing the stains of sin and for forging bonds of love between G-d and His people; and they also figure prominently in our quest of a favorable judgment for rainfall.

In contrast with Pesach, with its numerous prohibitions against eating, benefitting from *chametz*, or possessing it, Succos has no negative commandments particular to it alone; that is, all its *mitzvos* are positive. Negative commandments can carry with them the harsh punishment of *makkos* (lashes), and in some cases *karets*, excision, which manifests the severity of their transgression. The positive commandments of Succos, on the other hand, carry no such punishment for deliberate omission or transgression. This in itself is indicative of the nature of the season; at a time when, motivated by love, we are to return to G-d, we are granted five Divine gifts of love — *mitzvos* whose merits are great and whose liabilities are relatively minor — to help us achieve our goal.

SURROUNDED BY THE SUCCA

The *mitzva* to dwell in the *succa* is truly unique. Every part of one's body shares equally in the *mitzva*'s performance — in fact the individual is actually surrounded by the *mitzva* object. The Ba'al Shem Tov once declared, "I love the *mitzva* of *succa*. A man can enter it with his whole body — even with the mud on his boots!" Moreover, one can fulfill the *mitzva* even while sleeping, and its simple requirement that we "dwell" in the *succa* allows us to simultaneously perform other *mitzvos*, such as Torah study, prayer and *hachnasas orchim*.

In *Tefilla Zakka*, which is customarily recited before *Kol Nidrei*, we ask that the five discomforts that we will endure on that day atone, measure for measure, for the sins we may have committed with those organs which will now be denied pleasure; the *mitzva* of *succa*, because of its unique nature, also has the power to atone for sins committed by any and all organs of the body — with pleasure, instead of deprivation...out of love rather than fear.

Small wonder, then, that in the festival liturgy the *paytan* declares: "Let not the *mitzva* of *succa* be insignificant in your eyes, for her statutes equal those of other *mitzvos*. (9)"

As we know, *Zohar (Emor)* teaches that seven *ushpizin* (exalted guests) descend from *Gan Eden* and visit the *succa* on each day of the festival. The *Zohar* teaches further that one should invite the poor to his Succos table and provide them with the "portions" of the *ushpizin*, for if not, then those exalted guests will hold aloof from him.

In this way, the *mitzva* of *succa* is particularly auspicious for a favorable judgment for rainfall, for what better way to earn the blessing of bounty and contentment than by sharing one's own table with the needy?

The wine of judgment is tempered by

UNITED THROUGH THE FOUR SPECIES

The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 30) perceives the *arba minim* as symbolizing the Jewish Nation, subdivided into four distinct groups. The *esrog*, a fruit which has both taste and fragrance, represents the Jew who possesses both Torah knowledge and good deeds; the *lulav*, which has taste but no fragrance (referring to the dates that grow on the palm tree), alludes to those who have Torah knowledge but are deficient in performing good deeds; the *haddas* (myrtle), which has only fragrance, and the *arava* (willow), which has neither taste nor fragrance, round out the remaining groups.

What does G-d say with regard to these four symbolisms? "Let them be tied together in one band and they will atone one for the other." (*ibid.*)

The *arba minim*, then can be viewed as both representing a nation serving G-d in unison, and a call to its people to honor this symbolism. As a *mitzva* representing harmony among Jews, it carries with it the blessing of peace. "Great is peace, for even if Israel is guilty of idolatry, but it unified as a group, then the Attribute of Judgment will not harm them" (*Sifri, Naso*). Thus, when a Jew performs the *mitzva* of *arba minim* with proper intent, he "spreads *succas shalom* — a shelter of peace" over himself, which will protect him from any harsh judgments he may have incurred.

Furthermore, by performing this *mitzva* with four plants that depend on abundant water supplies for their growth, the Jew will merit a favorable judgment with regard to rainfall in particular.

The pouring of the water libations on the altar and the performance of the *arava*-circuits around it were primarily intended to invoke a favorable judgment for water. With regard to the water libations, G-d says, as it were, "Pour out water before Me on the Festival so that your rains for the year will be blessed" (*Rosh Hashana* 16a). The *arava*-circuits are performed with a plant that is not only dependent on an abundance of water, but in addition usually grows alongside a stream (*Succa* 33b), and therefore is symbolically important in the Jew's quest for rain. The altar, around which these two *mitzvos* center, was always the focus of the nation when it sought blessing and prosperity.

And as Rav Shmuel bar Nachmeini taught, all this indirectly affects the judgment of life itself.

THE HEALING POWER OF JOY

The loving return to G-d and His statutes, which Succos represents, finds its greatest expression in the commandment of "Vesomachta — and you shall rejoice" (*Devarim* 16:14). This true *simcha shel mitzva* is the antithesis of banal frivolity, of which King Solomon says, "And of joy, what does it do?" (*Koheles* 2:2).

Just as the day of Yom Kippur itself can bring atonement, so can repentance stemming from *simcha shel mitzva*. This is evident from the events surrounding the dedication of the First *Beis HaMikdash*, when Chazal tell us (*Moed Katan* 9), Yom Kippur was superseded by the ongoing celebration. The Prophet reports (*I Melachim* 8): "On the eighth day, he (King

Solomon) sent the people home...and they returned to their tents joyful and glad of heart, over all the good that Hashem performed for...Israel, His nation." Of what "good" does the Prophet speak? Rav Parnach said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, "That year Israel did not observe Yom Kippur and they were concerned, lest the enemies of Israel (a euphemism) were deserving of annihilation. Then a Heavenly voice proclaimed: 'You are all worthy of entering the World-to-Come!'" (*ibid.*).

Now, we can understand how the Heavenly voice had informed them that they would suffer no punishment for having failed to observe the Holiest of Days; but how could they possibly have achieved atonement for their sins of the past year without the cleansing process of the Day of Atonement? What replaced the day and its power to atone, without which certain sins cannot be forgiven? (See *Mishna Yoma* 8:8). Apparently, their transcendent joy had somehow accomplished this for them.

During the era of the *Battei Mikdash*, the *simcha shel mitzva* of Succos reached rare heights at the *Simchas Beis Hasho'eiva*, the celebration held on each of the Intermediate Days of Succos, in the Temple's Lower Court, in honor of the drawing of the water that would be used for the pour-offerings. As our Sages point out (*Succa* 50b), this was the fulfillment of the command: "You shall draw water joyously"; the water-drawing was a key rung in the ladder of repentance in preparation for the judgment over water, and without the accompaniment of joy, the ceremony would have been lacking in substance. Joy was essential to the fulfillment of this *mitzva*.

In fact, the elevation associated with this joy actually endowed some of the participants with *Ruach HaKodesh* (a spirit of Divine Inspiration). The *simcha shel mitzva* was so profound that according to Chazal, "He who did not witness *Simchas Beis HaSho'eiva* never saw rejoicing in his life" (*Mishna Succa* 5:1).

Active participation in this *simcha shel mitzva* was not open to all; it was reserved for the great scholars, heads of yeshivos and members of the *Sanhedrin*. Sages of unsullied piety were joined by *baalei teshuva* as all others looked on — the men from their vantage point in the court and women from a specially constructed gallery. (See Rambam, *Hilchos Lulav* 8:14; see *Succa* 53a for a detailed description.) The nation entered Hoshana Rabba in this lofty spirit, and in merit of this joyful encounter with G-d, the nation could hope to be found virtuous.

Then, with a mutual expression of love and joy between G-d and His children, Hashem, as it were, restrained *Klal Yisroel* from taking leave of Jerusalem. He beseeched them to remain one more day to celebrate the festival of Shemini Atzeres (*atzeres* meaning "restraint"; see *Rashi, Bamidbar* 29:35); note *Rashi's* portrayal of His request: "They are like children who are [about to] leave their father, and he says to them, 'Your departure is so difficult for me!'"

WHAT IS LEFT FOR US IN GOLUS?

Here we are in exile in a diminished state: we cannot perform the water pourings, nor join in the celebration that accompanied it; nor do we have the altar to circle with the *arava* ceremony.

We can, however, perform the *mitzva* of *succa* no differently from the days of old, entering the booth, becoming enveloped

the diluting flow of the waters of love.

in the *mitzva*. It is an almost universal custom to gather and celebrate in a spirit of true *simcha shel mitzva* the celebration called *Simchas Beis HaSho'eiva* as a remembrance of the Temple times. We fulfill the *mitzvos* of the *arba minim* all seven days of Succos (although in Temple times it was only performed on the first day by those outside the Temple area); and we perform the *Hoshana arava*-circuits around the *bima* for seven days in addition to the ceremony of Hoshana Rabba — both as a *Zeicher leMikdash* — commemoration of the Temple.

The concept of *zeicher leMikdash* was first expressed by Yirmiyahu (*Jeremiah* 30:17): "She is Zion, no one inquires after her." Says the *Gemora*: "Isn't it expected, then, that we do inquire after Zion? Our performance of *mitzvos* as a *zeicher leMikdash* is a demonstration of our concern over its destruction." (see *Succa* 41a)

It also serves as proof that we who are mired in the throes of a long and difficult exile firmly believe and anticipate the ultimate Redemption, when these *mitzvos* will be performed as in the days of old... This is perhaps the greatest expression of love of all.

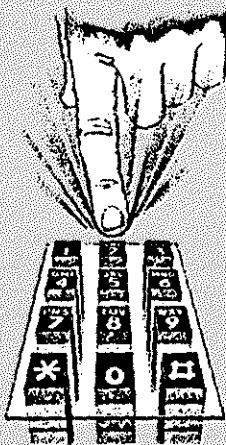
May we perform the *mitzvos hachag* in a spirit of true *teshuva me'ahava*, and may we soon merit the time when the world will be rid of all evil and G-d will spread a *succa* of peace over "us and His entire people, Israel, and Jerusalem."

FOOTNOTES

1. Other reasons for this designation include: a) the nature of the season — harvest time — demands an expression of joy over the abundance that fills one's house; and b) on this festival the joyous observance of *Simchas Beis HaSho'eiva* took place.
2. Many solutions are offered for this question. See *Rosh Hashana* 16a.
3. *Michtav Me'Eliyahu*, Vol. II pg. 68.
4. Dates of the month are the Torah's usual method for such an indication (*Beis Yosef, Orach Chayim* 581).
5. The Midrash perceives this term to imply "the first day in the accounting of sins," after the spiritual cleansing of Yom Kippur — possibly because the days of Yom Tov preparation that follow allow no opportunity to do sin; consequently the Jew stands before G-d on the first day of Succos in total purity, ready to begin his service anew.
6. In fact, there is a dispute recorded in the *Gemora* (*Succa* 43b) as to whether the circuits were made with a *lulav* or an *arava*. The Mishna (*ibid.*, *Mishna* 4:5) states clearly that the altar was ringed with *aravos*, hence the use of the term *arava* — circuits.
7. *Yotzros L'Yom Shetni*.

בס"ד

TORAH COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK PRESENTS Torah Programming For the Entire Family At The Push Of A Button SAMPLE PROGRAM FOR DIAL-A-SHIUR



	ON THE HOUR	20 MIN. AFTER THE HOUR	40 MIN. AFTER THE HOUR
SUNDAY (English)	Selections from EIN YAACOV Rabbi Fishel Shachter	NACH Rabbi Chaim Dov Altusky	HALACHA Rabbi Noach Isaac Oelbaum
MONDAY (English)	JEWISH HISTORY Rabbi Berel Wein	OUR DAILY TEFILLOS Rabbi Moshe Eisemann	INSPIRING STORIES read by Shlomo (Steven) Hill
TUESDAY (Yiddish)	הלכה Rabbi Avrohom C. Spitzer	שמירת הלשון Rabbi Meir Feldbrand	תרי"ג מצות Rabbi Michel Silber
WEDNESDAY (English)	A THOUGHT ON THE SEDRA TEHILLIM Rabbi Bernard Weinberger	Rabbi Pincus Tzvi Singer	A STUDY OF THE HOLOCAUST Rabbi Nosson Scherman
THURSDAY (Yiddish)	דברי התעוררות, מוסר, ודרוש על פרשת השבוע By the world renowned Maggid of Yerushalayim, Horav Sholom Schwadron		
FRIDAY	REPEAT OF WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAM		
מוצאי שבת	REPEAT OF THURSDAY'S PROGRAM		

PRODUCERS OF DIAL-A-DAF, MISHNAH-ON-THE-PHONE, DIAL-A-SHIUR

Cost: \$36 one time membership plus \$6 per month.

To hear a short sample call (718) 436-5166. For general information call (718) 436-4999.

Return to: Torah Communications Network, 1618-43 Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11204

Enclosed please find \$42.00 (one-time membership plus first month for Dial-A-Shiur)

Name _____ Tel _____ Date _____
Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Also send me information on: Dial-A-Daf Mishnah-On-The-Phone Sponsoring a Program