YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**the laws of THE FESTIVALS**

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Dedicated by Rabbi Uzi Beer in Honor of Rachel Beer

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In Memory of Herbert Perlman, Chaim be Aryeh z”l by Vera Perlman

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**THE LAWS OF SUKKOT**

**by Rav David Brofsky**

**Shiur #38: *Hoshanot***

***Mitzvat Arava* in the *Beit Ha-Mikdash***

Aside from the mitzva to take the *arba minim*, which applies *mi*-*de’oraita* for seven days in the *Beit Ha-Mikdash* and for one day outside of the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*, the Talmud discusses another mitzva of Sukkot – that of the “*arava*.” The *mishna* (*Sukka* 42b) teaches that this mitzva is practiced for all seven days of the Festival in the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*.

The Talmud (*Sukka* 44a) cites a debate regarding the origins of this mitzva:

According to Abba Shaul … It is written, “*arvei nachal*” (willows of the brook) – implying two, one referring to the [willow-branch in the] *lulav* and the other to [the willow-branch for use in] the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*… According to the Rabbis … it is an accepted tradition, since R. Assi citing R. Yochanan who heard it from R. Nechunia of the Plain of Beth Churatan, stated: The laws of the ten plants, the willow-branch, and water libation were given to Moses upon Mount Sinai.

According to Abba Shaul, the mitzva of *arava* in the *Mikdash* is of biblical origin, while according to the Rabbis, it is a Halakha Le-Moshe Mi-Sinai, an ancient tradition received at Sinai.

The mishna (*Sukka* 45a) describes how the ceremony was performed on the first six days of Sukkot:

How was the precept of the *arava* [carried out]? There was a place below Jerusalem called Motza. They went down there and gathered there young willow-branches and then came and fixed them at the sides of the altar so that their tops bent over the altar. They then sounded a *teki'a*, a *teru'a* and again a *teki'a*. Every day they went round the altar once, saying, “*Ana Hashem, hoshi’a na – Ana Hashem, hatzelicha na*.” R. Yehuda said: [They said], “*Ani Ve-Ho, hoshi’a’ na.*”

After retrieving the *aravot* from Motza, they were stood up against the altar (“*zekifa*”). These *aravot* were quite long; the *gemara* describes, “They were large and long and eleven *amot* (cubits) high, so that they might bend over the altar one *ama*.” The *shofar* was sounded, the altar was circled once, and the pleas of “*Ana Hashem*” or “*Ani Ve-Ho*” were recited.

Although the mishna describes standing the *aravot* up against the altar, the Talmud (*Sukka* 43b) records that the Amoraim disagree regarding whether the *mitzva* of *arava* is fulfilled through “*netila*” (taking) or “*zekifa*” (standing up against the altar). Even according to those who maintain that the mitzva of *arava* is fulfilled through the “*netila*," however, the *arava* is still placed against the altar, either before (Rambam, *Hilkhot* *Lulav* 7:23-24) or after (Rashi, *Sukka* 43b, *s.v. ve-vevi’um*; Tosafot, *Sukka* 45a, *s.v. zokfin*) the “*netila*."

The *gemara* (*Sukka* 43b) relates this to another question: Was the *lulav* or the *arava* taken around the alter each day? If the mitzva of *arava* if fulfilled through “*netila*," then, the *gemara* assumes, it must be the *arava* that is taken around the altar. If, however, the mitzva of *arava* is fulfilled through the “*zekifa*," then the *arba minim* are most likely taken around the *mizbe’ach*.

The *gemara* concludes that the mitzva of *arava* includes “*netila*." Therefore, according to some (Rashi, *Sukka* 43b, s.v. ve-hevi’um; see also Or Zaru’a 315) the *mizbe’ach* was circled (*hakafa*) with the *arava*. Others (Rambam, *Hilkhot Lulav* 7:23; Ran, *Sukka* 22a, s.v. *u-vegemara*; see also Or Zaru’a 315) maintain that even if the *arava* is “taken," the *hakafa* is still performed with the *lulav*.

So far, we have seen that the *aravot* were possibly “taken" and then stood up against the altar, and the *mizbe’ach* was circled once each day. The *Rishonim* question who actually performed these rituals in the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*. This debate revolves in part around another question. Some *Rishonim* (Rashi, *Sukka* 43b, s.v. *sheluchei*; see also Tosafot, *s.v. sheluchei*) explain that only the *kohanim* fulfilled the mitzva; in general, only “unblemished” *kohanim* were permitted to enter the area on the Temple Mount between the *UIam*, the entrance hall of the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*, and the *mizbe’ach*, the altar (*Keilim* 1:9). Others (Or Zaru’a 2:315; see also Shita Mekubetzet, *Menachot* 27b; Responsa Ri Mi-Gash 43, and possibly Rambam, *Hilkhot* *Lulav* 7:22-3; see also Tosafot Yom Tov 4:5) insist that even “*zarim*” (non-*kohanim*) would encircle the altar. The Yalkut Shimoni (*Tehillim* 703) also states: “And how was the altar circled? All of Israel, the adults and the children, would take their *lulav*s in their right hands and their *etrog*s in their left hands and would circle [the altar] once.”

Interestingly, the Ritva (*Sukka*h 43b, s.v. *u-farkinan*; see also Ran, *Sukka* 21b, s.v. *garsinan*) explains that although only the *kohanim* took the *aravot* and stood them against the *mizbe’ach*, and then circled the *mizbe’ach*, the rest of the people would take the *arava* while standing in the *Azara*, the Temple courtyard.

***Hoshanot* During *Sukkot* Nowadays**

Although the Talmud never mentions reenacting the daily observance of the mitzva of *arava* after the destruction of the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*, sources as early as the *Siddur* of R. Saadia Gaon (p. 238) record that it was customary for the congregation, led by the *shaliach tzibbur*, to encircle the *bima*. This custom spread to most Diaspora communities, and R. Hai Gaon (Otzar Ha-Geonim, *Sukka* 43b) comments that “we have not heard of a place in which this is not the custom.” The Shibbolei Ha-Leket (Seder Chag Ha-Sukkot 469), however, records that this was apparently not the custom in Italy. It is now customary to encircle the *bima*, either after *Hallel* (Sha’are Teshuva 751:20) or after *Musaf* (Tur 759–760; see Iggerot Moshe, *Orach Chaim* 3:99), while reciting the *hoshanot* prayers for each specific day.

Incidentally, the Sefer Chassidim (730) relates that R. Saadia Gaon would travel to *Eretz Yisrael* each year in order to encircle the Mt. of Olives (or, possibly, **on** the Mt. of Olives) seven times on Hoshana Rabba.

The Shulchan Arukh (760) describes that it is customary to bring a *Sefer* *Torah* to the *bima*, or as the Rema records, to bring all of the *Sifrei Torah* to the *bima*, and to encircle the *bima* just as they would encircle the altar in the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*, beginning from the right side. Although we do not take the *lulav* on Shabbat, it is still customary to recite the *hoshanot* on Shabbat. The Shulchan Arukh rules that even one who does not have a *lulav* encircles the *bima*, but the Rema writes that one who does not have a *lulav* does not participate in the *hakafot*. Finally, the Rema rules that an *avel*, a mourner during the entire 12 months of mourning for his parent, does not circle the *bima*. The Mishna Berura (760:9), citing the Gra, explains that since taking the *lulav* around the *mizbe’ach* was the primary fulfillment of “And you should rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days,” a mourner, who is not happy, does not participate in this ritual. Usually, those who do not have a *lulav*, as well as the mourners, hold the *Sifrei Torah* during the *hoshanot*.

***Hoshana Rabba* in the *Beit Ha-Mikdash***

The mitzva of *arava* in the *Beit Ha-Mikdash* differed on the seventh day of Sukkot, known as Hoshana Rabba, in two ways. First, on Hoshana Rabba, the altar was encircled seven times, and not just once:

But on that day [i.e., the seventh day], they went around the altar seven times. When they departed, what did they say? “Yours, o altar, is the beauty! Yours, o altar, is the beauty!” R. Eliezer said: [They said]: “To the Lord and to thee, o altar, to the Lord and to thee, o altar.” (*Sukka* 45a)

Some (see Abudraham, *Seder Tefillat Sukkot*, for example) cite the verse, “I will wash my hands in innocence; so will I compass (*asovava*) Your altar, O Lord, That I may make the voice of thanksgiving to be heard, and tell of all Thy wondrous works” (*Tehillim* 26:6-7) as a precedent for encircling the *mizbe’ach* as a form of praising God. Furthermore, the Yerushalmi (*Sukka* 4:3) suggests that taking the *lulav* around the *mizbe'ach* seven times may serve as a “remembrance” for the seven times the city of Yericho was encircled before it was captured. The Kol Bo (72) cites the Maharam of Rotenburg, who brought a textual proof for this comparison: The encircling of the altar parallels the encircling of “the city," Yericho, as the verse says (*Shir Ha-shirim* 3:2), “I will rise now, and I go about (*asovava*) the city." The commentaries offer different explanations of the relationship between encircling Yericho seven times and the encircling of the *mizbe’ach*.

Second, on Hoshana Rabba, the *arava* was taken in the *Beit Ha-Mikdash* even on Shabbat. This issue was of great contention between the Rabbis and the Boethusians (Baitosim). In fact, the *gemara* (*Sukka* 43b) relates:

On one occasion, the seventh day of the [ceremonial of the] willow-branch fell on a Sabbath, and they brought saplings of willows on the Sabbath eve and placed them in the courtyard of the Temple. The Boethusians, having discovered them, took and hid them under some stones. The next day, some of the ignorant Jews discovered them and removed them from under the stones, and the priests brought them in and fixed them in the sides of the altar. [The reason for hiding the willows was that] the Boethusians do not admit that the “*chivut*” of the willow-branch overrides the Sabbath.

The *gemara* further explains that we are not concerned that taking the *arava* may lead to the desecration of the Sabbath, as it is entrusted to the “messengers of the *beit din*.” Since the mitzva of taking the *lulav* in the *Beit Ha-Mikdash* can only performed on Shabbat when the first day of the Festival falls out on Shabbat, the Rabbis did not want the *arava*, which is not explicitly mentioned in the Torah, to appear to be a more important mitzva than taking the *lulav*, and therefore allowed it to be taken on Shabbat only on Hoshana Rabba.

As mentioned above, the *Amoraim* disagree as to whether the altar was circled seven times with the *lulav* or with the *arava* (*Sukka* 43b). In addition to circling the altar, the *gemara* refers to a mysterious ritual called “*chivut* *arava*." The *gemara* elsewhere (*Sukka* 44b), describing the taking of the *arava* nowadays, relates that “a man brought a willow-branch… and he took it and ‘*chavit chavit*’ without reciting any blessing.” What was this “*chivut* *arava*” which was performed on the seventh day?

Most *Rishonim*, including the Rambam (Commentary to the Mishna, *Sukka* 4:5 and *Hilkhot Lulav* 7:20-21) explain that one should beat the *arava* on the ground or on a vessel. Rashi (*Sukka* 42b, *s.v. ve-hevi’um* and 44b, *s.v. chavit*) explains that the *arava* was waved (*na’anu’a*).

What is the significance of the “*chivut* *arava*”? Seemingly, if “*chivut* *arava*” refers to waving the *arava*, then the waving of the *arava* should be similar to the *na’anu’im* of the *arba minim* – just as the *arba minim* serve as an object that one uses to praise God, the “*arvei nachal*" serve as an instrument for petitioning God for rain. If, however, as most *Rishonim* understand, the “*chivut* *arava*” refers to beating the *aravot* on the ground or on a vessel, there must be some other significance to the practice.

We can identify two broad approaches to *chivut* *arava*.

On the one hand, one may view the *chivut* *arava* as a prayer for rain, among the other prayers for rain recited on Hoshana Rabba, since the world’s supply of rain is decided on the Festival of *Sukkot* (*Rosh Ha-Shana* 2a). Beating the *aravot* on the ground may symbolize surrender or prostration. It may also demonstrate how desperately we need rain to hit and penetrate the earth.

Why are *aravot* used for this purpose? The *aravot*, or “*arvei nachal*," grow on the water and depend on water for their sustenance. Furthermore, *Chazal* suggest that all four *minim* correspond to the parts of the body – the *lulav* parallels the spine, the *etrog* the heart, the *hadassim* the eyes, and the *aravot* resemble the mouth – as all parts of the body are used to praise God (see Midrash Tanchuma [Buber], *Parashat Emor* 28). Therefore, the *aravot* may be the most appropriate instrument used for our prayers for rain, as they resemble the mouth, the vessel of prayer. (See also Teshuvot Ha-Geonim, Sha’arei Teshuva 340, where R. Tzemach Gaon suggests that hitting the *aravot* to the ground atones for sins committed by one’s speech.)

Interestingly, R. Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Kohen Kook (1865-1935), as cited by R. Moshe Tzvi Neria (Mo’adei Ha-Ra’aya, p. 128), offers a different explanation. The midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 30:12), explains how each of the four *minim* correspond to a different type of Jew. The *etrog*, with its smell and taste, represents a Jew with “Torah and good deeds,” the *hadasim* and *lulav* represent Jews with good deeds but no Torah or no Torah but good deeds, and the *arava*, which has neither a nice smell nor a good taste, represents those Jews who have no Torah or good deeds. This beautiful *midrash* explains that when taken together, “they atone one for the other.” R. Kook, however, understood the role of the *arava* slightly differently. The *arava* represents the “*am* *ha’aretz*” – the simple Jew, who often demonstrates intuitive, healthy, and natural religious instincts (see *Sukka* 43b). On Hoshana Rabba, R. Kook explains, we do not “beat the *aravot*," but “beat WITH the *aravot*,” invoking that simple religious fervor in our pleas for rain.

On the other hand, beating the *aravot* may indeed symbolize “beating," in the negative sense. R. Tzemach Ga’on (Teshuvot Ha-Geonim, Sha’arei Teshuva 340), for example, in response to a query regarding the reason for this practice, cites those who explain: “During the preceding holidays [Rosh Ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur], Satan incites, and the Jewish People, with all of their *mitzvot*, repel him. From now onwards, anyone who rises against us will not be able to control us, and will fall to the ground.” Some Kabbalistic sources speak of beating the strict attribute of justice (*middat ha-din*).

Some understand this custom to refer to our relationship to other Jews. For example, R. Moshe Shternbuch (b.1926), in a somewhat shocking essay (Mo’adim U-Zemanim, vol.1, p. 179), writes:

It is well known that the *arava*, which has no taste and no smell, is pleasant to us only when bound together with the *lulav*, *etrog* and *hadassim*. This hints to the sinners of Israel, who have no taste or smell… When the *arava* is taken alone, we are obligated to beat it on the ground, to hint to us that those sinners who separated into their own groups, such as the Reform, Conservative, Nationalists (*le-umi’im*), and the like, since they come by themselves, we are obligated to “beat them” until they surrender and are lowered, and not to bring them closer at all, and certainly not to bind ourselves to them.

R. Kook’s explanation, cited above, stands in sharp contrast to these harsh words.

***Hoshana Rabba* outside of the *Beit Ha-Mikdash***

The *gemara* (*Sukka* 44a–44b) explains that outside of the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*, the *mitzva* of *Arava* was observed for one day – on the seventh day, Hoshana Rabba. The *Amoraim* disagree as to whether this practice is considered to be a “*yesod* *nevi’im*” (actual legislation of the later prophets) or a “*minhag nevi’im*” (a custom of the prophets):

It was stated: R. Yochanan and R. Yehoshua b. Levi differ. One holds that the rite of the willow-branch is a “*yesod nevi’im*,” and the other holds that the willow-branch is a “*minhag nevi’im*." It can be concluded that it was R. Yochanan who said that it is a “*yesod nevi’im*," since R. Abbahu stated in the name of R. Yochanan: The rite of the willow-branch is a “*yesod nevi’im*." This is conclusive.

The *Rishonim* (see Rashi, s.v. *minhag*) explain that while one may recite a blessing over a “*yesod nevi’im*, similar to a Rabbinic enactment, one may not say a blessing over a “*minhag nevi’im*." The Tur (664) cites R. Shmuel ben Chofni, who rules that outside of the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*, *arava* is a *yesod nevi’im* and a blessing is therefore recited. Most *Rishonim* (Rambam, *Hilkhot Lulav* 7:22; Rosh *Sukka* 4:1, et al.), however, as well as the Shulchan Arukh (664:2), rule that *arava* outside of the *Beit Ha-Mikdash* is a *minhag nevi’im*, and therefore no *berakha* is recited.

Incidentally, the *Rishonim* disagree as to whether one may derive from this *gemara* that one may never recite a blessing over a custom (Rambam, *Hilkhot Berakhot* 11:16) or whether there are certain customs, such as the recitation of *Hallel* on Rosh Chodesh (see *Ta’anit* 28b), upon which one may one say a *berakha* (Rabbenu Tam, cited by Tosafot, Sukka 44b, s.v. *kan*).

The Talmud further discusses whether the *arava* taken on Hoshana Rabba much be taken separately, or whether one can use the *arava* taken with the *lulav*:

R. Ammi ruled: The willow-branch… must be taken separately only, and no one can fulfill his obligation with the willow-branch in the *lulav*. But since the Master said that it must be taken separately only, is it not self-evident that no one can fulfill his obligation with the willow-branch in the *lulav*? I might have said that that applies only where one does not lift [the *lulav*] a second time, but not where one does lift it a second time; therefore he informs us that it is not so. R. Chisda citing R. Yitzchak, however, ruled: One may fulfill his obligation with the willow-branch in the *lulav*. (*Sukka* 44b)

Some *Rishonim* (Ra’avya 699; Rosh 4:1) rule in accordance with R. Chisda, who permits one to take the *arba minim* a second time in order to fulfill the *mitzva* of *arava*, but others (Rabbeinu Chananel 44b; Rambam, *Hilkhot* *Lulav* 7:20) rule that one must take the *arava* separately. The Shulchan Arukh (664:6) cites both opinions. The Mishna Berura (664:21) cites the Bikkurei Ya’akov, who writes that if one takes the *arba minim* and then unbinds them, removes the *aravot*, and takes them separately, he fulfills his obligation.

The *gemara* relates to the minimum physical characteristics of the *arava*:

What is its prescribed minimum? R. Nachman said: Three fresh twigs with leaves. R. Sheshet, however, said: Even one leaf and one twig. One leaf and one twig! Can such a rule be imagined? Say rather: Even one leaf on one twig.

The Tur (764) cites R. Hai Gaon, who writes that although the *gemara* validates an *arava* branch with only one leaf, it is “*mekhu’ar*” (repulsive) to use such a branch for the mitzva. Therefore, the Rema (764:4) writes, one should take a bundle of *aravot*, known as “*hoshanot*,” in order to fulfill the principle of “This is my God, and I beautify Him” (*hiddur mitzva*). The Mishna Berura (764:16) writes that one should have at least three, if not five *aravot*, in accordance with the custom of the Arizal. The Mishna Berura (764:17) also writes that these *aravot* should be tied together.

Rashi (*Sukka* 44b, s.v. *ale*) implies that the *arava* may be shorter than three *tefachim*, the minimum length required for *aravot* when taken with the *arba minim*. The Ran (*Sukka* 22a, s.v. *ve-khama*), however, disagrees, and argues that all agree that the *arava* branch must be at least three *tefachim* long. The Shulchan Arukh (664:4) rules in accordance with the Ran; although one may take one branch with one leaf to fulfill the mitzva of *arava* outside of the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*, the branch must be at least three *tefachim* long.

The *Rishonim* debate whether on Hoshana Rabba, one encircles the *bima* while holding the *lulav* or also the *arava*. The Shulchan Arukh (764:3) records that it was customary to take the *arava* as well. The Rema (764:7), however, writes that one should preferably not take the *arava* with the *lulav* at all. The Mishna Berura (764:26-27) cites the Arizal, who opposed taking the *arava* with the *lulav*. The Mishna Berura relates that nowadays, it is customary to take the *lulav* alone, put it down when one reaches the prayer “*Ta’aneh Emunum*,” and only afterwards to take the bundle of *aravot* (Mishna Berura 760:8). Some follow the practice of the Arizal and do not put down the *lulav* until after the full *Kaddish*, and then to take the *aravot* and beat them.

What should one do with his “*hoshanot*” (bundle of aravot)? As we mentioned above, the *gemara* (*Sukka* 44b) describes a ritual called “*chivut* *arava*," which was performed both in the *Beit Ha-Mikdash* and, according to the story related in the *gemara*, after its destruction as well. The *Rishonim* disagree as to whether *chivut* refers to “beating” the *arava* or shaking it. The Shulchan Arukh (764:4) cites the Rambam and rules that one should beat the *arava* on the ground or on a vessel two or three times. The Rema, however, writes that it is customary to shake and then beat the *arava*. The Mishna Berura, citing the practice of the Arizal writes that one should beat the *arava* on the ground five times, and then beat them on a vessel in order to remove some of the leaves. The Arukh Ha-shulchan (764:2) records that he has not heard of this custom, but does recommend “shaking it a bit” before beating it (764:7).

**The Significance of Hoshana Rabba**

In the Talmud, Hoshana Rabba is simply known as “the seventh day of the *arava*” (*Sukka* 42b). The phrase “*Hoshana*” or “*Hoshana Rabba*” appears in the midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 37, *Midrash Tehillim* 17:5). Although the *arava* ritual described above indicates that the seventh day of *Sukkot* is unique, its significance is not discussed by the Talmud.

The Yerushalmi (*Rosh Ha-Shana* 5:8) teaches, “Yet they seek Me daily (*yom yom*) (*Yeshayahu* 58:2) – this refers to the *teki’a* (*shofar*) and the *arava*” – implying that Hoshana Rabba is similar to Rosh Ha-Shana, as they are both days in which objects are employed as instruments of prayer. The Zohar (vol. 3, p. 31b) adds that Hoshana Rabba is a day of judgment: “This [Hoshana Rabba] is the final day of judgment for water, source of all blessings. On the seventh day of *Sukkot*, the judgment of the world is finalized and the edicts (*pitkin*) are sent forth from the King.”

The *Rishonim* (Shibbolei Ha-Leket 371; Sefer Ha-Manhig, *Hilkhot Etrog* 38) expand on this idea, explaining that *Hoshana Rabba* is the final day of the period of judgment, which began on *Rosh Ha-Shana*. Indeed, as the Tur (664) reminds us, the world’s water supply is judged on *Sukkot*, and therefore we lengthen our prayers on Hoshana Rabba, like on *Yom Tov*.

Based upon this view of Hoshana Rabba, many customs developed. Some are accustomed to learn the entire night of Hoshana Rabba (see Magen Abraham 664). Others read the entire book of *Devarim*, which emphasis the love and fear of God, on the night of Hoshana Rabba (see Arukh Ha-shulchan 664:11). In addition, the *Acharonim* (Arukh Ha-shulchan, ibid., for example) record that it is customary for the *shaliach tzibbur* to wear a *kittel* and to recite the long *Pesukei De-Zimra* of *Yom Tov* (except for *Nishmat* and *Shokhen Ad*). Based upon the Zohar cited above, it is customary to great one another with the salutation, “*pitka tava*,” wishing one a “good edict."

**The Conclusion of *Sukkot* – Leaving the *Sukka***

Towards the end of Hoshana Rabba, we begin our transition from the festival of *Sukkot* to *Shemini Atzeret*. The *mishna* describes:

When a man has finished his [last] meal, he may not dismantle his *sukka*. He may, however, remove its furniture from the afternoon onwards in honor of the last day of the festival. (*Sukka* 48a)

Many have the custom of eating a bit in the *sukka* before the end of the day, and declaring, “It should be His will that we will merit to sit in the *sukka* of the Levithan” (Rema 667:1).

Next week, we will begin our study of the final day of the festival, *Shemini* *Atzeret*.