**S.A.L.T. – CHAG SUKKOT 5779**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

The Gemara in Masekhet Sukka (38a) tells that Rav Acha bar Yaakov had the practice on Sukkot to wave the four species forward and backward, and declare, “This is an arrow in the eye of the *Satan*!” Rav Acha perceived the long, straight, pointy *lulav* as a symbol of a spear with which we pierce “*Satan*’s eye.” How might we explain this symbolic image of the *lulav*?

*Chatam Sofer* (*Derashot*, p. 67) suggested that the message of Rav Acha’s practice lies in the fact that he perceived the *Satan* – an allegorical reference to the *yetzer ha-ra*, our weaknesses and vices – as standing in front of him, facing him. Rav Acha sought to instruct that even after the intensive period of the *Yamim Noraim*, when we underwent a process of introspection and repentance, “*Satan*” is still in front of us, poised to “attack.” We might make the mistake of believing that after having gone through the process of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, confessing our wrongdoing, acknowledging our failings, begging God for forgiveness, and genuinely resolving to improve henceforth, we have essentially conquered “*Satan*,” and no longer need to struggle with our faults and our negative tendencies. We might think that once the Days of Awe have come to a close, we can rest assured that our goals and aspirations for the coming year will be easily realized without much effort. Rav Acha therefore specifically announced that “*Satan*” remained in front of him and continued to pose a grave threat. Even on Sukkot, which comes on the heels of the uplifting experience of the *Yamim Noraim*, we must continue to struggle against our vices and make a concentrated effort to steer ourselves in the direction we need and so very much want to follow.

Interestingly, the Gemara expresses its disapproval of Rav Acha’s practice, advising that such statements should not be made “*de-ati l-igeruyei bei*” – we might end up “provoking” *Satan*. What this might mean is that we must never take a “triumphalist” attitude towards our weaknesses and faults. The Gemara felt that Rav Acha’s statement expressed inappropriate confidence and self-assurance in his ability to withstand temptation and conquer his base instincts. We are warned never to let our guard down, never to think to ourselves that we are safely protected from “*Satan*,” from our negative tendencies. Religious life demands constant effort and struggle, and at no point can we assume that we have entirely divested ourselves of spiritual challenges that we need to work to overcome.

Sunday

The *arba minim* – the four species which we are obligated to hold and wave each day of Sukkot – are arranged with the *hadasim* and *aravot* bound to the *lulav* branch, while the *etrog* is held separately from those three species. The Gemara in Masekhet Sukka (37b) establishes that one should hold the *lulav* – together, of course, with the *hadasim* and the *aravot* – in his right hand, and the *etrog* in his left. The reason, the Gemara explains, is that the more prominent hand – the right hand – should be used for three *mitzvot* – the *lulav*, the *hadasim* and the *aravot* – whereas the left, which is less prominent, for the single *mitzva* of the *etrog*.

The *Magen Avraham* (651:6) raises the question of why the Gemara found it necessary to explain why the *lulav* should be held in the right hand. When fulfilling the *mitzva* of *arba minim*, we recite the *berakha* of “*al netilat lulav*” – specifying the *lulav*. And the *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 206:4) rules that whenever one recites a *berakha* over a piece of food, a beverage, or something fragrant which he smells, he must hold the item in his right hand. Seemingly, this *halakha* should extend to the *berakha* over the *lulav*. Since – for reasons which lie beyond the scope of our discussion – we recite the *berakha* specifically over the *lulav*, it should naturally follow that we must hold the *lulav* in our right hand as we recite the *berakha* over this *mitzva*. Why, then, did the Gemara find it necessary to resort to the reason that the *lulav* includes three *mitzvot*, whereas the *etrog* is just one *mitzva*?

The *Magen Avraham* offers two answers to this question. First, he suggests that the Gemara here also addresses the more basic question of why we hold the *lulav* and *etrog* in separate hands, rather than holding them both in the same hand. Since all four species are included in the *mitzva*, it would seem appropriate to hold all of them together, in the more prominent hand. The answer is that the Torah, in formulating this command, appears to set the *etrog* apart from the other three species, as it links the other three species with the conjunction “*ve-*” (“and”; “*kapot temarim va-anaf eitz avot ve-arvei nachal*”). Once the Torah indicates that the *etrog* should be held separately from the other three, it stands to reason that the other three should be held in the right hand, given the prominence associated with the right side.

The *Magen Avraham* then proceeds to offer what appears to be a far simpler and more convincing answer, noting that *Halakha* requires holding the three other species in the right hand even when no *berakha* is recited. If one takes the four species later in the day, after having already fulfilled the *mitzva* (such as when one takes the four species for the *hoshanot* prayer), he does not recite the *berakha*, since the *mitzva* had already been fulfilled. If the reason for holding the *lulav* in the right hand was due solely to the requirement regarding the recitation of *berakhot*, then it would not apply in cases when no *berakha* is recited. The Gemara therefore presented an additional reason to explain why the *lulav* is always held in the right hand, even when no *berakha* is recited.

Monday

Yesterday, we noted the question raised by the *Magen Avraham* (651:6) regarding the Gemara’s discussion of the requirement to hold the *lulav* in the right hand and the *etrog* in the left. The Gemara (Sukka 37b) explained that since the right hand is considered more prominent, it is appropriate to use the right hand to hold the *lulav*, to which the *hadasim* and *aravot* are bound, so that the right hand holds three *mitzvot*, whereas the left hand holds just the *etrog*. The *Magen Avraham* noted that seemingly, this should be required irrespective of this consideration, due to the fact that the text of the *berakha* recited over the *arba minim* specifies the *lulav* (“*al netilat lulav*”). Just as *Halakha* requires holding in one’s right hand the piece of food over which he recites a *berakha*, it should, presumably, require holding the *lulav* in one’s right hand while reciting the *berakha* over the *lulav*. Why, then, does the Gemara present a different reason for this *halakha*?

Rav Shlomo Kluger, in his *Chokhmat Shelomo*, noted that this question hinges on the debate among the *Rishonim* as to how a left-handed individual should hold the four species. The *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 651:3) follows the ruling of the *Ba’al Ha-itur* that *Halakha* draws no distinction in this regard between right-handed and left-handed people, and even those who are left-handed hold the *lulav* in their right hand. The Rama, however, notes the Ashkenazic practice, which is based on the position of the Rosh and Rabbeinu Yerucham, that left-handed individuals should hold the *lulav* in their left hand. The *Chokhmat Shelomo* observes that according to all views, a left-handed person who recites a *berakha* over a piece of food should hold the food in his left hand. Therefore, according to the view of the *Shulchan Arukh*, the Gemara needed a different reason for holding the *lulav* in the right hand in order to explain why even a left-handed person should do so. The standard guidelines governing the recitation of *berakhot* would dictate holding the *lulav* in the left hand, and so the Gemara clarifies that the more prominent hand should hold three *mitzvot*, rather than just one, thus explaining why even a left-handed person holds the *lulav* in his right hand.

The *Chokhmat Shelomo* adds that regardless, we can answer the *Magen Avraham*’s question based on the fact that the *etrog* is the species which the Torah lists first in issuing the command of *arba minim* (Vayikra 23:40). As the Torah itself seems to ascribe to the *etrog* a degree of prominence over the other three species, one might have assumed that it should be held in the right hand when we recite the *berakha* and fulfill the *mitzva*. The Gemara therefore established that the *lulav*, which is held together with two other species, is more prominent by virtue of its consisting of three *mitzvot*, and thus it is held in the right hand.

Tuesday

The opening Mishna of Masekhet Sukka establishes that – according to the majority view among the *Tanna’im* – a *sukka* which is higher than twenty *amot* (approximately 30-40 feet) is disqualified for use for the *mitzva*. The Gemara cites numerous different explanations of this ruling, including Rabbi Zeira’s remark that “until twenty *amot*, a person dwells in the shade of the *sukka*; beyond twenty *amot*, a person dwells not in the shade of the *sukka*, but rather in the shade of the walls.” This means that the *sukka* obligation requires a structure whose *sekhakh* – covering – provides shade, and this is not possible if the *sekhakh* is too high. If the *sekhakh* is higher than twenty *amot*, it hardly provides any shade to those inside the *sukka*, as the vast majority of the shade is provided by the walls. Since the *sekhakh* is situated very high in the air, the amount of sunlight it blocks is negligible, and thus this *sukka* cannot be defined as a halakhic *sukka*. Later (2b), the Gemara cites Rav as commenting that Rabbi Zeira would allow a *sukka* that is higher than twenty *amot* if it covers an area larger than four square *amot*. When the surface area of the *sekhakh* is this large, it provides shade even from a height of higher than twenty *amot*, and so such as *sukka* is acceptable. (For a discussion of Rabbi Zeira’s view from a mathematical standpoint, see Dr. Shimon Bolag’s article in *Ha-ma’ayan*, vol. 20, pp. 71-75.)

Rav Yaakov Ettlinger, in his *Arukh La-ner* (*siyum* printed after commentary to Masekhet Sukka), suggests that this *halakha*, as understood by Rabbi Zeira, symbolically reflects one of the central themes of the *mitzva* of *sukka*. The *sekhakh*, Rav Ettlinger writes, which is situated above us as we reside in the *sukka*, represents divine providence, the care and protection which God constantly and graciously provides. This why the *sekhakh* must be raw vegetation that has not been processed in any way, as it symbolizes the absence of human initiative. The walls of the *sukka*, by contrast, represent human effort, the work we invest in order to help ourselves. A *sukka* requires both *sekhakh* and walls, because we believe that we are to both invest effort to care for ourselves, and trust that the outcome ultimately depends solely on Providence. Both elements are indispensable to the *sukka*, because both elements are indispensable to a proper religious life. However, Rav Ettlinger writes, the *mitzva* of *sukka* is meant to draw our attention primarily to the *sekhakh*, to our reliance on the Almighty. We reside in the *sukka* to commemorate the period our ancestors spent journeying through the uninhabitable wilderness, miraculously cared for by God, to remind us that even now, when we build our own “walls,” and work to earn a sustenance, ultimately, it is God who provides us with our needs. The *mitzva* of *sukka* can be fulfilled only if we dwell in the shade of the *sekhakh*, if we recognize that we live under God’s constant care and rely at all times on His beneficence – because this is precisely the message (or at least one of the messages) conveyed by this *mitzva*. If the shade of the *sukka* is supplied mainly by the walls, the *sukka* is unfit for use because it represents the mistaken notion that our needs are cared for primarily through our own work and initiative. The *mitzva* of *sukka* reminds us that no less now than during the period when our ancestors traveled the desert, we are dependent solely on the “*sekhakh*” – on God’s never-ending care and blessings, that notwithstanding the need to do everything we can to care for ourselves, ultimately, the results depend exclusively on the Almighty.

Wednesday

The Mishna in the second chapter of Masekhet Sukka (25a) establishes the well-known rule that it is permissible on Sukkot to eat “*arai*” – a small amount – outside the *sukka*. The *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 639:2) rules that this refers to a quantity of bread up to a *ke-beitza* (the volume of an egg).

The *Shibolei Ha-leket* (344) cites a fascinating ruling in the name of Rabbeinu Avigor, imposing a very significant qualification on this exemption, namely, that it does not apply on Shabbat or Yom Tov. If one eats even small amounts on the first day of Sukkot (or first two days in the Diaspora), or on Shabbat during Sukkot, then the food must be eaten in the *sukka*. This ruling is based upon the principle established by the Gemara in Masekhet Beitza (34b) that even a small snack eaten on Shabbat is treated as a meal with respect to the laws of *ma’aser* (tithing). As the Gemara there discusses, if one has produce which he plans on bringing into his home, he may eat small amounts before bringing it into his home without separating the required tithes. Although he may not eat a meal from this produce, he is allowed to eat small amounts at this point. However, the Gemara states that on Shabbat, the consumption of even small amounts constitutes a “meal,” insofar as it fulfills one’s obligation of *oneg Shabbat* (enjoying oneself on Shabbat), and thus such produce may not be eaten in any amounts on Shabbat if the tithes have not been separated. Rabbeinu Avigdor contended that this provision is relevant to the obligation of *sukka*, as well. The consumption of even small amounts of food on Shabbat – and Yom Tov – qualifies as “*akhilat keva*” – eating a “meal” – and thus requires a *sukka*. Therefore, in his view, it is only on the weekdays of Sukkot that *Halakha* permits eating small amounts outside the *sukka*.

Several later writers challenged Rabbeinu Avigdor’s theory in light of the next Mishna in Masekhet Sukka (26b), which tells of two rabbis who were once brought small amounts of food and made a point of eating the food in the *sukka*. The Gemara explains that this story was told to instruct that although one is permitted to eat small amounts of food outside the *sukka*, it is legitimate for a person to act stringently and avoid eating any quantity of food outside the *sukka*. (Meaning, adopting such a measure is deemed appropriate and admirable, and not an arrogant display of misplaced piety.) According to Rabbeinu Avigdor, we might wonder how the Gemara reached such a conclusion. After all, it is possible that this incident occurred on Shabbat, or on Yom Tov, and it was for this reason that these sages insisted on eating the small amounts of food in the *sukka*. The fact that the Gemara did not consider this possibility would seem to prove that no distinction exists in this regard between the different days of Sukkot, and even on Shabbat and Yom Tov, small amounts of food may be eaten outside the *sukka*. Indeed, the *Elya Rabba* (639:1) contends that the halakhic authorities generally ignored Rabbeinu Avigdor’s ruling because it is disproved by the Gemara’s discussion. (Others, however, suggested ways of defending Rabbeinu Avigdor’s position. See, for example, the Chida’s discussion in *Birkei Yosef*, 639:5.)

Thursday

Yesterday, we noted the surprising and novel ruling of Rabbeinu Avigdor, cited by the *Shibolei Ha-leket* (344), qualifying the principle allowing the consumption of small amounts of food outside the *sukka* on Sukkot. As the *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 639:2) rules, this refers to amounts up to a *ke-beitza* (the volume of an egg). This exemption is mentioned explicitly by the Mishna (Sukka 25a), but Rabbeinu Avigdor asserted that it applies only on the weekdays during Sukkot. On the first day of Sukkot (or first two days outside *Eretz Yisrael*), and on Shabbat of Sukkot, the consumption of even small amounts of food is considered significant given the requirement to feast on Shabbat and Yom Tov. Just as *Halakha* regards eating small amounts on Shabbat and Yom Tov as significant with respect to tithing (as explained yesterday), with respect to the *sukka* obligation, too, even small amounts are significant on Shabbat and Yom Tov, and must be eaten in the *sukka*.

Rav Yitzchak Nunez Belmonte, in his *Sha’ar Ha-melekh* commentary to the Rambam’s *Mishneh Torah* (Hilkhot Sukka 6:7), notes that this view appears to have been taken also by *Tosefot*, commenting to Masekhet Berakhot (49b). *Tosefot* there address the Gemara’s ruling in Masekhet Sukka (27a) that the first night of Sukkot differs from the rest of the festival in that one is required to eat a meal in the *sukka* on the first night. During the rest of Sukkot, when we wish to eat a meal we must do so in the *sukka*; on the first night, however, we are obligated to eat a meal in the *sukka*. The Gemara establishes the unique requirement of the first night of Sukkot based on the association between Sukkot and Pesach: just as the Torah requires eating *matza* on the first night of Pesach, similarly, the Torah requires eating a meal in the *sukka* on the first night of Sukkot. *Tosefot* (among others) raise the question of why the Gemara ignores in this context the general halakhic obligation to eat a meal on Yom Tov. Irrespective of the association between Sukkot and Pesach, there is a *mitzva* to eat a meal on Yom Tov, and thus on Sukkot, when all meals must be eaten in the *sukka*, we are naturally required to eat a meal in the *sukka*. *Tosefot* answer that indeed, we are in any event required to eat a meal in the *sukka* on the first day of Sukkot because it is a Yom Tov, but the Gemara establishes that additionally, the association between Sukkot and Pesach imposes the separate requirement to eat a meal on the first night of Sukkot that is independent of the general obligation to eat a meal on Yom Tov. However, *Tosefot* then raise the question as to the practical difference between these two requirements. Why did the Gemara bother establishing the special obligation to eat a meal in the *sukka* on the first night of Sukkot, when in any event there is an obligation to eat a meal on Yom Tov?

Seemingly, the *Sha’ar Ha-melekh* notes, the answer to *Tosefot*’s question should be obvious. The obligation to eat a Yom Tov meal can be fulfilled with the quantity of a *ke-zayit* (the volume of an olive) of a bread, whereas the special obligation to eat a meal in the *sukka* on the first night of Sukkot requires eating considerably more – an amount exceeding a *ke-beitza*. As mentioned, the *sukka* obligation requires eating in the *sukka* only meals consisting of this large amount of bread. Thus, if the Torah requires eating a meal in the *sukka* on the first night of the holiday, it stands to reason that it requires eating an amount that throughout Sukkot must be eaten in the *sukka*. Hence, the special requirement that applies on the first night of Sukkot requires eating more than a *ke-beitza* on this night, beyond the *ke-zayit* amount required on every Shabbat and Yom Tov.

Notably, *Tosefot* do not present this answer. Instead, they explain that the difference between the two obligations surfaces in a case where rain fell on the first night of Sukkot, and one ate his meal indoors, after which the rain stopped. In such a case, one has fulfilled his obligation to eat a Yom Tov meal, but he did not eat a meal in the *sukka*, and so he would be required to eat a second time, in the *sukka*.

Apparently, the *Sha’ar Ha-melekh* writes, *Tosefot* felt that both obligations on the first night of Sukkot require eating only a *ke-zayit*. Although in general a *sukka* is required only when eating a larger amount, *Tosefot* appear to have felt – like Rabbeinu Avigdor – that even the amount of a *ke-zayit* requires a *sukka* on Yom Tov (and, presumably, on Shabbat). Given the special importance of eating on Yom Tov, even smaller amounts are deemed halakhically significant and thus require a *sukka*.

The *Sha’ar Ha-melekh* concedes, however, that this stringency is not mentioned by the halakhic authorities, and thus does not seem to represent the consensus view.

Friday

In describing the procedure for fulfilling the *mitzva* of the four species on Sukkot, the *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 651:2) writes that one takes the three species in his right hand, and the fourth – the *etrog* – in his left. This presentation might perhaps be intended to clarify not only with which hands the different species are to be held, but also the sequence. Meaning, as several commentators asserted, the *Shulchan Arukh* here might be intending to establish that one should first take hold of the bundle with the *lulav*, *hadasim* and *aravot* with his right hand, and only thereafter take hold of the *etrog* in his left hand.

The *Magen Avraham* (651:8), however, citing earlier writers, contends that to the contrary, one should first take hold of the *etrog* before taking hold of the other three species. Furthermore, the *Magen Avraham* rules that when one finishes using the four species, he should first put down the *lulav*, and only then put down the *etrog*. In other words, according to the *Magen Avraham*, when fulfilling the *mitzva* of *arba minim*, one must be holding the *etrog* whenever he holds the *lulav* (with the *hadasim* and *aravot* bound to it). The basis for this ruling, as the *Magen Avraham* writes, is the procedure for putting on *tefillin*. The *Machatzit Ha-shekel* explains that when we put on *tefillin*, we first place the *tefillin shel yad* on our arms before placing the *tefillin shel rosh* on our heads, and when we remove our *tefillin*, we first remove the *tefillin* *shel rosh* before removing the *tefillin shel yad*. Since the Torah first mentions the requirement of the *tefillin shel yad* before the *tefillin shel rosh*, the Sages inferred that the *tefillin shel yad* must always be worn whenever the *tefillin shel rosh* is worn. Hence, we must put on the *tefillin shel yad* first, and remove it last. By the same token, the *Magen Avraham* felt that as the Torah mentions the *etrog* first when listing the four species (“*u-lkachtem lakhem…****peri eitz hadar***” – Vayikra 23:40), we must take hold of the *etrog* first and put it down last.

Interestingly, the *Magen Avraham* proceeds to note how this ruling affects the case of somebody who wishes to give his *arba minim* after fulfilling the *mitzva* to somebody else so he can also fulfill the *mitzva*. The first person, the *Magen Avraham* writes, cannot first hand his fellow the *lulav*, because his fellow will then be taking hold of the *lulav* before the *etrog*, but he also cannot hand his fellow the *etrog* first, because he must hold the *etrog* as long as he is holding the *lulav*. The *Magen Avraham* therefore writes that in such a case, the first person must place the four species on a table or other surface (placing first the *lulav* and then the *etrog*), from where his fellow will then take them, rather than hand them to his fellow directly. Later (651:12), the *Magen Avraham* proposes an alternative option, suggesting that the first person transfer the *lulav* to his fellow’s left hand, and then the *etrog* to that same hand. The second person then transfers the *lulav* to his right hand. Since the *lulav* must be held in the right hand and the *etrog* in the left, the second person is considered as having first taken hold of the *etrog*, because taking hold of the *lulav* with his left hand is halakhically insignificant.

Rav Yechezkel Landau (author of *Noda Bi-yehuda*), in his *Dagul Mei-revava*, dismisses the *Magen Avraham*’s ruling, rejecting the comparison between *arba minim* and *tefillin*. In his view, one should first pick up the *lulav*, and after completing the *mitzva*, one may put the four species down in whichever sequence he chooses.

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