**S.A.L.T. – Sukkot 5780**

**Ve-zot Ha-berakha**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

The Mishna in Masekhet Sukka (51b) describes the festivities of the special *Simchat Beit Ha-sho’eiva* celebration held in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* each night of Sukkot, and tells that the people at one point would recall the idolatry practiced by their ancestors, during the First Temple area. They would cite the verse in Yechezkel (8:16) in which the prophet tells that he was shown twenty-five men in the Temple courtyard bowing eastward to the rising sun while their backs were turned to the Temple. The celebrants in the *Simchat Beit Ha-sho’eiva* in the Second Temple period would specifically turn to face the *Mikdash* and proclaim, “Our forefathers who were in this site had their backs to the Sanctuary and their faces to the east, bowing eastward to the sun, but we – our eyes are to the Lord!”

Why would the idolatry practiced in the First Temple be worthy of mention in the Second Temple, and how is this relevant to the *Simchat Beit Ha-sho’eiva* celebration on Sukkot?

The answer might be found in Sefer Yirmiyahu, where we read of an exchange that took place after the First Temple’s destruction between Yirmiyahu and the Jews who relocated in Egypt after the Babylonian conquest of *Eretz Yisrael*. Yirmiyahu delivered to the people God’s stern condemnation of their continuing the pagan practices which they had observed in the *Eretz Yisrael*, on account of which God had the land conquered by a foreign empire. The people outright rejected the prophet’s message, stating, “We shall assuredly do everything that we spoke about – to bring offerings to the kingdom of heaven and pour libations to it, just as we and our forefathers, our kings and noblemen, did in the cities of Judea and in the squares of Jerusalem, and we were satiated with bread and enjoyed prosperity, and experienced no evil. But once we stopped bringing offerings to the kingdom of the heaven…we lacked everything…” (Yirmiyahu 44:17-18). The worship of the “kingdom of the heaven” – the sun, moon and stars – was practiced with the belief that this brought material prosperity. The people attributed their economic success to their pagan worship of the sky, and so they stubbornly insisted on continuing these practices – even after watching their country fall into the hands of a foreign nation.

With this background, we can perhaps understand the relevance of this unfortunate chapter in Jewish history to the celebration of Sukkot. One of the themes of Sukkot, which is observed at the conclusion of the harvest season, after the crops have been harvested and brought into storage in preparation for the winter, is the recognition of God as the source of our sustenance. Just when the warehouses are filled with the crops that the people toiled for months to produce and harvest, they are told to move into *sukkot* and relive *Benei Yisrael*’s experience in the wilderness, when they lived a miraculous existence, sustained supernaturally by God. On Sukkot we are reminded that our success and prosperity is granted to us from God, and cannot be credited to our own efforts or any other force. This might also be the significance of the *nisukh ha-mayim* ritual on Sukkot, when copious amounts of precious water were poured on the altar each day of the holiday, as the nation’s water reserves were dwindling at the end of the long, dry summer, expressing their faith in God’s provision of water during the coming winter months. And thus as part of the festivities, the people would loudly reject their ancestors’ belief in pagan forces as the source of their sustenance. As they celebrated God’s beneficence, they noted that unlike their pagan ancestors, they relied solely on the Almighty for their economic wellbeing, trusting that it is He who provides them with their needs and there is no other force and no other being on whom to depend in our quest for a respectable and comfortable livelihood.

Sunday

The Gemara in Masekhet Sukka (27b) brings the minority position of Rabbi Eliezer that one fulfills the *mitzva* of *sukka* on Sukkot only in a *sukka* which he legally owns. In Rabbi Eliezer’s view, one who is invited to eat or sleep in his fellow’s *sukka* does not fulfill the *mitzva*, as one must reside specifically in his own *sukka*. This ruling is based on the Torah’s formulation in reference to the *sukka* – “*ta’aseh* ***lekha***” (“you shall make **for yourself**” – Devarim 16:13). The word “*lekha*,” according to Rabbi Eliezer, indicates that one must own the *sukka* he uses for the *mitzva*. Rabbi Eliezer compares the *mitzva* of *sukka* in this regard to the *mitzva* of the four species, which the Torah introduces with the formulation, “*u-lkachtem* ***lakhem***” – “you shall take **for yourselves**” (Vayikra 23:40), from which the Sages inferred that one fulfills the obligation (on the first day of Sukkot) only with four species which he legally owns. By the same token, according to Rabbi Eliezer, one must own the *sukka* he uses for the *sukka* obligation, which the Torah introduces with the term “*lekha*.”

Of course, *Halakha* does not follow this opinion, as the majority of the *Tanna’im* disagreed, and maintained that one may fulfill the *mitzva* of *sukka* in somebody else’s *sukka*. This ruling is inferred from the verse in Sefer Vayikra (23:42), “*Kol ha-ezrach be-Yisrael yeishevu ba-sukkot*” – “All citizens of Yisrael shall reside in *sukkot*.” The word “*sukkot*” in this verse is spelled without the letter *vav*, such that the word could be read in the singular form (“*sukkat*”). The Gemara thus understands this verse as alluding to the fact that “all Yisrael are able to reside in a single *sukka*” – meaning, that all Jews in the world could, theoretically, share a single *sukka*. On this basis, the Sages concluded that one can fulfill the *mitzva* even with a *sukka* that he does not own.

It is not clear, at first glance, how this reading of the verse proves that one does not need to own the *sukka* he uses to fulfill the *mitzva*. After all, if all Jews share a single *sukka*, then each person partially owns the *sukka*. How, then, does this prove that one is not required to own the *sukka* he uses for the *mitzva*?

Rashi explains that if all Jews in the world share ownership over a single *sukka*, then necessarily, no single individual owns a legally significant value of the *sukka*. Each Jew’s portion is worth a minuscule amount (far less than a “*shava peruta*” – the lowest unit of Talmudic currency), and thus no Jew can be said to own the *sukka* in a legally meaningful sense. This hypothetical scenario to which the Torah alludes thus demonstrates that ownership is not required for the fulfillment of the *mitzva* of *sukka*.

*Tosafot* disagree, arguing that this conclusion was reached by the simple fact that the Torah envisions Jews fulfilling the *mitzva* with a *sukka* which they jointly own. According to Rabbi Eliezer, who requires using a *sukka* which one owns, one cannot fulfill the *mitzva* with a *sukka* over which he shares ownership with somebody else. As mentioned, Rabbi Eliezer compares the *mitzva* of *sukka* to the *mitzva* of four species, which one must personally own, and *Tosafot* note (citing the Gemara in Masekhet Bava Batra 137b) that partners who jointly own the four species cannot fulfill the *mitzva* with those plants. Necessarily, then, Rabbi Eliezer likewise does not allow using for the *mitzva* a *sukka* over which one shares ownership. As such, it suffices for the majority view to note the Torah’s allusion to a *sukka* jointly owned by all Jews to disprove Rabbi Eliezer’s position. The critical point, according to *Tosafot*, is not that no Jew owns a significant value of the *sukka*, but rather than no Jew owns the *sukka* exclusively.

In defense of Rashi’s explanation, the Ritva asserts that according to Rashi, although partners who jointly own the four species cannot use them for the *mitzva*, Rabbi Eliezer would allow partners who jointly own a *sukka* to use that *sukka* for the *mitzva*. The difference, the Ritva explains, lies in the fact that when one partner takes the four species, he takes them in their entirety, and necessarily uses the other partner’s share in the species. As the Torah requires using species which one owns, the *mitzva* cannot be fulfilled in this fashion. When one uses a *sukka*, however, he uses only the space which he occupies, which can be determined to be his share in the *sukka* (based on the halakhic concept of *bereira*). Since a partner can use the *sukka* without making use of the other partner’s share in the *sukka*, he is considered to be using his own *sukka*, and thus even according to Rabbi Eliezer, this would be acceptable.

A much simpler and more straightforward reading of the Gemara is suggested by Rav Elazar Moshe Horowitz of Pinsk, in his notes to Masekhet Sukka (printed in the back of standard editions of the Talmud). He explains that when the Gemara interprets the verse as alluding to a scenario of all Jews using a single *sukka*, it refers to a single Jew’s *sukka*. In other words, this hypothetical situation is not one of a *sukka* jointly owned by the entire Jewish Nation, but rather of one Jew’s *sukka* which all other Jews can, theoretically, use for the fulfillment of the *mitzva*. According to this reading, the verse alludes to precisely the case under debate by Rabbi Eliezer and the other Sages – whether one may use his fellow’s *sukka* for the *mitzva*, and thus the other Sages prove from this verse that one may fulfill the *mitzva* using his fellow’s *sukka*.

Monday

The Gemara in Masekhet Sukka (31a) brings a debate between Rabbi Yehuda and the other *Tanna’im* as to whether a dried *lulav* is suitable for the *mitzva* of the *arba minim* on Sukkot. Rabbi Yehuda maintained that a dried *lulav* may be used, because it is only the *etrog*, and not the other three species, which is referred to as “*hadar*” (“beautiful” – Vayikra 23:40). In Rabbi Yehuda’s view, the *etrog* is the only one of the four species which has a special requirement of “*hadar*” – that it must be aesthetically pleasing – and so a dried *lulav* is acceptable. The other *Tanna’im*, however, maintain that although only the *etrog* is described as “*hadar*,” the “*hadar*” requirement nevertheless applies to all four species.

*Halakha* follows the majority opinion, that all four species must maintain the standards implied by the term “*hadar*.” However, according to one view among the *Rishonim*, a distinction between the *etrog* and the other species exists even within the majority opinion. The Gemara (31a-b) establishes that if the only available *lulav* is withered, it may be used for the fulfillment of the *mitzva*, because the “*hadar*” requirement is not indispensable for the *mitzva*’s fulfillment when no other options are available. The Ritva asserts that this is true of the three other species, but not of the *etrog*. Since the Torah explicitly required the standard of “*hadar*” for the *etrog*, one cannot fulfill the *mitzva* with a dried *etrog*. This is in contrast to the view of *Tosafot*, who maintained that all four species are equivalent in this respect.

Regardless, it is clear that the element of “*hadar*” is uniquely associated with the *etrog*, more so than with the other three species. This close connection is particularly pronounced in the view of the Ritva, but even according to *Tosafot*, it is significant that the Torah introduced the “*hadar*” requirement specifically in reference to the *etrog*, even though it applies equally to all four species.

Some have suggested a symbolic explanation for the special connection between the *etrog* and the quality of “*hadar*.” Rav Naftali of Ropshitz is cited as explaining the notion of “*hadar*” based on the Midrash’s comment (*Vayikra Rabba* 30:14) that the four species represent different parts of the body, with the *etrog* symbolizing the heart (the *lulav* symbolizing the spine, the *hadas* the eye, and the *arava* the mouth). The emphasis of “*hadar*” in reference to the *etrog*, Rav Naftali of Ropshitz suggested, teaches of the unique importance of ensuring that our heart is “beautiful,” directed towards the proper priorities and ambitions, as the heart, to a large extent, is what controls the rest of the body and determines our conduct.

A more famous passage in the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 30:12) explains the four species as symbols of different kinds of Jews, with the *etrog* symbolizing the most righteous members of the nation, who excel both in Torah knowledge and in *mitzva* performance. Accordingly, it has been suggested that the special emphasis on “*hadar*” in regard to the *etrog* teaches that the righteous scholars are required to maintain uniquely high standards of “beauty” in their conduct and appearance. While we all are, of course, to conduct ourselves in an ethical, dignified and becoming manner, the “*etrogim*” of the nation, the spiritual leaders, bear a special obligation of “*hadar*.” As the Rambam discusses at length in *Hilkhot Dei’ot* (chapter 5), Torah scholars are strictly required to act in a way that brings respect and honor to the Torah which they represent. Therefore, even though the “*hadar*” obligation applies to all four species, it is especially pronounced in reference to the *etrog*, emphasizing the unique responsibility that rests upon the spiritual leaders of *Am Yisrael* to conduct themselves in a “beautiful” manner.

Tuesday

The Gemara in Masekhet Beitza (30b) brings a *berayta* establishing that anything placed in the *sukka* for decoration is forbidden for personal use throughout the entirety of the holiday. The *berayta* gives the example of various kinds of foods – such as fruits and nuts – that were hung in the *sukka* for decorative purposes, and it states that these foods are forbidden to be eaten throughout Sukkot. This *halakha* is codified in the *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 638:2), who adds that even if a food hung for decoration falls at some point during Sukkot, it may not be eaten, since it had been earmarked for the purpose of decorating the *sukka*.

The Rama writes that on Yom Tov and Shabbat, the decorations are considered *muktzeh* and may not even be moved. Later, the Rama distinguishes in this regard between decorations hung from the *sekhakh* and those hung on the walls. The Rosh (cited by the *Tur* and *Mishna Berura*, beginning of 638) was of the opinion that whereas the *sekhakh* is forbidden for use during Sukkot, the wood of the walls is permissible for use (such as if, for example, one wishes to chip some wood from the walls to use for a fire). Although the *Shulchan Arukh* does not follow this opinion, the Rama writes that this view allows us room for leniency at least with regard to the posters and other decorative items placed on the walls. The Rama thus writes that it is permissible to move the wall decorations inside on Shabbat and Yom Tov if rain begins to fall, in order to protect them.

The *Mishna Berura* notes that many later *poskim* took issue with the Rama’s leniency, asserting that no distinction exists between the decorations hung from the *sekhakh* and those placed on the walls. Some – including the *Magen Avraham* – noted the Gemara’s discussion in Masekhet Sukka (10a-b) where it suggests that the *berayta* establishing the prohibition against benefitting from the decorations refers to decorative sheets hung “from the side,” which Rashi explains to mean along the walls. This clearly indicates that even the decorations on the walls are included in the prohibition – even according to the Rosh, who permits deriving benefit from the wood of the *sukka*’s walls.

In defense of the Rama’s ruling, the *Mishna Berura* notes in his *Sha’ar Ha-tziyun* that the *Sefer Ha-ittur* – which, he writes, was not in print in the times of earlier *Acharonim* – explained the Gemara’s remark differently, as referring to decorations hung to the side of the *sekhakh*, and not along the walls. While it is not entirely clear what this means, the Gemara does not, according to this interpretation, speak of decorations on the walls, and thus it does not necessarily refute the Rama’s lenient ruling.

In any event, even the Rama writes that one should preferably stipulate before Sukkot that he does not confer the sanctity of the *sukka* on decorations which he might need to move inside during Sukkot. Although the Rama earlier cited the Maharil as stating that the custom nowadays is not to make a stipulation before Sukkot to permit use of the wood of the *sukka* or the decorations, he permits making such a stipulation with regard to the wall decorations which might need to be moved inside during Sukkot due to rain and the like.

Wednesday

The *Chatam Sofer*, in one of his responsa (O.C. 184; cited in *Bei’ur Halakha* to 638:2), addresses the case of somebody who had hung an *etrog* in his *sukka* for decoration, and then during Sukkot he wanted to give it to somebody who had been unable to obtain an *etrog* for the *mitzva* of *arba minim*. The *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 638:2) rules that items hung in the *sukka* for decoration are forbidden for personal use during Sukkot, and the question thus becomes whether using a decoration for a *mitzva* purpose – such as the *mitzva* of *arba minim* – is included in this prohibition.

The *Chatam Sofer* ruled that this is permissible, for two reasons. First, he notes the famous principle of “*mitzvot lav lei-hanot nitenu*,” which means that performing a *mitzva* does not qualify as halakhic “*hana’a*” (“enjoyment,” or “benefit”). Something forbidden for personal use is not forbidden for *mitzva* use, and so an *etrog* hung as a decoration in the *sukka* may be used for a *mitzva* purpose. Secondly, the *Chatam Sofer* writes that the basis of the prohibition against using *sukka* decorations is *bizui mitzva* – the disrespect shown to the decorations, which were designated for the *mitzva* of enhancing the *sukka*. Using a *mitzva* object for another *mitzva* is not halakhically regarded as disrespect, the *Chatam Sofer* observes, as evidenced by the fact that one may remove *tzitzit* strings from a garment to affix them onto another garment, and one may light a Chanukah candle from a different candle. Similarly, then, it would be permissible to take an *etrog* that had been used for decorating a *sukka* and use it for the *mitzva* of *arba minim*.

Rav Eliezer Waldenberg, in his *Tzitz Eliezer* (13:67), applies the *Chatam Sofer*’s ruling to permit taking a decoration from one *sukka* and hanging it in another. This issue could arise in the case of a young child who prepared a decoration in school which was hung in the child’s family’s *sukka*, and during Sukkot the family visits the child’s grandparents. Rav Waldenberg rules that the family would be allowed to remove the decoration from the *sukka* (during Chol Ha-mo’ed) in order for it to then be hung in the grandparents’ *sukka*. Since the decoration is being used for a different *mitzva* purpose, this is permissible.

However, Rav Moshe Sternbuch, in his *Moadim U-zmanim* (6:68), makes an exception to this *halakha*, ruling that it is forbidden to take a decoration hanging from the *sekhakh* of a *sukka* and move it to the wall. The Rama (638:2) writes that the status of decorations hung from the wall is questionable, given the view of the Rosh that even the *sukka* walls themselves are permissible for personal benefit on Sukkot. In light of this uncertainty, the Rama rules that there is greater room for leniency when it comes to the wall decorations, which are not regarded as *muktzeh* on Shabbat and Yom Tov the way the *sekhakh* decorations are. As such, Rav Sternbuch writes that one should not move decorations hung from the *sekhakh* to the wall, since this might constitute a reduction of their status. Since decorations on the wall might not be infused with the halakhic sanctity assigned to the decorations hung from the *sekhakh*, it would be forbidden, at least according to Rav Sternbuch, to move a decoration from the *sekhakh* to the wall.

Thursday

The Midrash, in a well-known passage (*Vayikra Rabba* 30:12), explains the four species as symbols of different types of Jews. The *etrog*, with its pleasing fragrance and sweet taste, symbolizes the righteous scholars among *Am Yisrael* who excel in both Torah study and Torah observance. The *lulav*, which is scentless but comes from a palm which produces luscious dates, symbolizes those who immerse themselves in Torah learning but fall short in their observance, whereas the *hadas*, which has a fragrance but is inedible, represents those who observe but do not devote time to study. Finally, the *arava* represents those whose commitment to both learning and observance is inadequate.

The *Bach* (O.C. 216), interestingly enough, references this Midrash in a halakhic context, in regard to the question surrounding the recitation of a *berakha* when smelling the *etrog*. The *Tur* (O.C. 653) writes (based on the Gemara, Sukka 37b) that it is permissible to smell the *etrog* on Sukkot, despite the fact that it has been designated for a *mitzva*, because as an edible fruit, its primary non-*mitzva* use is consumption, not fragrance. The *etrog*’s designation for the *mitzva*, the *Tur* writes, requires that we refrain only from using it for its primary mundane purpose – eating – but not from smelling it. Normally, when one smells a fragrant fruit to enjoy its scent, he recites the *berakha* “*she-natan rei’ach tov ba-peirot*,” and the *Tur* (both in 216 and 653) cites the view of the Ra’avya that one recites this *berakha* when smelling the *etrog* on Sukkot, as well. However, the *Tur* then notes the opinion of Rabbeinu Simcha who disagreed, and maintained that since this *etrog* had been set aside for use as a *mitzva* article, it is not regarded as a standard fragrant fruit, and thus a *berakha* is not recited. Its identity is that of a *mitzva* object, and is thus not intended to be used for fragrance, and therefore, no *berakha* should be recited when smelling it. The *Bach* comments that in light of the aforementioned passage in the Midrash, it could be argued that indeed, the *etrog* used for the *mitzva* is intended to be smelled. Since its fragrance is an integral part of its symbolic meaning, one should have this symbolism in mind when fulfilling the *mitzva* of *arba minim*, and the *etrog* is, in fact, meant to be used for its fragrance. The *Bach* observes the custom to specifically smell the *etrog* when fulfilling this *mitzva*, explaining that this is done to bring to mind the symbolic message of the *etrog*, representing the righteous scholars among *Am Yisrael*.

Nevertheless, the *Bach* concludes that it is preferable not to smell the *etrog* which is used for the *mitzva*, in order not to place oneself in a situation of uncertainty regarding the requirement to recite a *berakha*. This is also the ruling of the *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 216:14, 653:1). As for the custom mentioned by the *Bach* to smell the *etrog* before fulfilling the *mitzva*, his son-in-law, the *Taz* (653:1), cites the *Semak* as commenting that this is a “*minhag shetut*” (“foolish practice”).

The *Magen Avraham* (216:21) cites the Maharshal as drawing a distinction in this regard between the time when one takes the *etrog* to fulfill the *mitzva*, and at other times during Sukkot. According to the Maharshal, it is only at the time when one fulfills the *mitzva* that Rabbeinu Simcha maintained that no *berakha* is recited before smelling the *etrog*. If one wishes to smell the *etrog* at some other time during Sukkot, then all views agree that a *berakha* is recited, since at that moment, the *etrog* is not being used for the *mitzva*. The *Chafetz Chaim*, in *Bei’ur Halakha*, notes that other *poskim* disputed the Maharshal’s ruling, but he sides with the Maharshal, arguing that there is no reason not to recite a *berakha* when smelling the *etrog* when it is not being used for the *mitzva*, even during Sukkot.

Friday

In concluding his blessing to *Benei Yisrael* before his death, Moshe foresees the time when the nation’s enemies will try to deceive them – “*ve-yikachashu oyevekha lakh*” – but *Benei Yisrael* will triumph. Moshe assures them, “*ve-ata al bamoteimo tidrokh*” – literally, “you shall tread upon their high places” (33:29). A number of commentators, including Rashi and Seforno, explain that this prediction refers to the defeat of even the mightiest warriors of the enemy nations that threaten *Benei Yisrael*.

Rav Shimon Schwab is cited as offering an allegorical interpretation of this phrase. He suggested reading Moshe’s final blessing as an exhortation to *Benei Yisrael* – that the highest moral standards of the other nations must be our starting point. The image of *Benei Yisrael* “trampling” on the “high places” of the other nations charges us with the obligation to surpass the morals of other peoples. The Torah’s commands come not in place of, but rather in addition to, the basic moral and ethical norms that are expected of all humankind. The Torah’s obligations begin at the place where basic, elementary ethics and manners end, and Moshe’s final instruction to us is to make other people’s “high places” the point upon we “tread,” meaning, the minimum standard that we maintain, as we strive for a much higher level of conduct.

On this basis, Rav Schwab explained the significance of the famous story told in Masekhet Kiddushin (31a) of Dama ben Netina, a gentile diamond merchant in Ashkelon who was rewarded for the exceptional respect he showed to his father. The rabbis at that time approached him to purchase an expensive jewel, but he could not make the transaction because the key to his safe was underneath his father’s pillow as his father slept, and Dama refused to wake his father. God rewarded Dama with the birth of a rare *para aduma* (red heifer) in his herds, which he was able to sell to the Jews for a large sum. Rav Schwab remarked that the Gemara told this story in order to show us the minimum standard to which we must aspire in the way we treat our parents. The nation that received God’s Torah is expected to strive for the highest ethical standards, and so the Gemara describes for us the pinnacle of the non-Jews’ morality so that we aspire to extend well beyond that point and become the great people that God expects us to be.

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