

A SUKKOS READER

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A Taste of an Esrog Tree

By Rabbi Yitzchak Scher/Yeshiva of Greater Washington/Kollel Zichron Amram

Sukkos serves as a culmination of our holiday season. It actually fills this role on two levels. It's the last of the yearly *shalosh regalim* cycle (beginning in Nisan) and also the finale of the High Holiday season. Why is Sukkos the final destination, the seal of our annual calendar experience?

One unique aspect of Sukkos is the mitzvah of the four species. Chazal teach that each one of the four species represent distinct ideals and thoughts, and Chazal describe each one. The Esrog is described by Chazal in many ways, with one description being that an Esrog is from a tree whose taste is similar to that of its fruit.¹ Besides the culinary value of this interesting fact, why do Chazal, tell us this about an Esrog? What ideal does this fact represent?

An additional unique mitzvah of Sukkos is the *nisuch hamayim*, the water libation offered daily on Sukkos with the *Korbon Tamid* (daily offering). To us, water, as necessary as it is to human life, does not seem to be an appropriate offering to give on the *mizbeach*. We would never present a gracious host with a gift of water as a token of our appreciation. This gift would seem quite odd and possibly insulting to most hosts. Other offerings in the Beis Hamikdash were of meat, wine, or flour. What is the meaning of presenting Hashem with an offering of water and why is this offering connected with Sukkos?

Additionally we are told that the Simcha of the water drawing ceremony was the most joyous event of the year in the Beis Hamikdash, and possibly the greatest Simcha in all of history²! Why?

To answer these questions, we must look back at some events that occurred during the creation of the world. The creation story of the first day concludes with “and it was evening and it was morning, day one³.” Chazal note that the Torah does not say “the first day” but rather “day one,” alluding to the fact that it was a day of total oneness, unity⁴. Only Hashem existed in the world. There was no other life, nor any angels. No splits. No plurality. Only the One and Only, Hashem. Saying “the first day” would have implied that there are other days. However, “Day One”

¹ Sukkah 35a, cited by Rashi Vayikra 23:40

² Sukkah 51a

³ Bereishis 1:5

⁴ See Rashi ibid.

was a day with no *others*. It was a day of total unity, total revelation of *Hashem Echod*, the oneness of Hashem in the world.

On day two, Hashem created the *Rakia*, a layer to divide between the “upper waters” and “lower waters⁵”. This is the first division occurring between the Heavens and the Earth in the Torah. Additionally, Chazal tell us that Hashem created the *malachim* (angels) on the second day, which are the first other “living” beings to exist besides Hashem. This signifies to us that on day two the unity and oneness of day one was lost. Day one can now be seen as the first of many, just the first day. The world now has divisions, different pulls. There is an “upper” layer and a “lower” layer with a divider in between. There are now *malachim*, other beings to whom we can attribute power, *chas v’sholom*. At times, we may even neglect to recognize that their power only comes from the One Creator. The second day becomes a day of division, plurality, and a blurring of the ultimate clarity of Hashem Echod in the world. (The words “*Ki tov*” (“it was good”) are not mentioned on day two. One explanation of this is because it was a day that disguised *Hashem Echod* in the world and became the root of the possibility of *Avoda Zara* and all evil in the world.)

In a sense, the above description gives us a great insight into the nature of the world itself and into our own individual missions. Hashem is One. The world is the place in which He chose to reveal Himself and His will. Essentially, the entire world is an expression of the One Creator. There are no divisions, no pieces, and no plurality. It all is merely an expression of Hashem, empowered, energized, and guided by His Will. Day One shows us this unity. There was only Hashem on Day One. There was nothing else to which we could even mistakenly attribute any power. It was the day displaying the ideal *Echod*, unity.

However, a world like that has no room for humans, and certainly no room for a meaningful mission in life. Our mission must involve choices and challenges. The world of Day One was a world of total clarity, not allowing for free choice or challenge. On day two Hashem opens up the world for our ultimate mission. This world is here so that we can reveal Hashem even from within the physical, from within a world of illusions, other “options”, and concealment. On day two, the heavens and earth split, with a barrier placed in between. Angels are created. The setting is made for a world of challenge, division, and concealment of *Hashem Echod*. Other “powers” are now in place within the creation. Hashem’s unity and control is now not as vividly perceived as before. This is the world in which we

⁵ Bereishis 1:6

live; the world after day two when we do not always recognize our source. The upper waters are split from the lower waters, alluding to the fact that the “upper world” is not seen clearly within the “lower world”.

Accordingly, a fascinating event happens on day three of creation. Hashem instructs the land to produce “*eitz pri oseh pri*”, which Chazal explain means that the land should produce fruit trees whose wood actually tastes like their fruits⁶. However, the land “disobeys” Hashem and only produces “*eitz oseh pri*”, a tree that produces fruit, but does not taste like the fruit itself. Obviously, the land has no free choice and had no options or personal preference regarding the trees it produced. There is a deeper message that the Torah is illustrating through this event. What is this message?

The most essential example of the physical world is the ground itself. It is physicality at its core. The physical world, because of the nature and purpose of its creation, must itself conform to its purpose. If the purpose of this physical world, as described above, is to allow for Man and his mission, the world *must* conceal its Source. If the Source, Hashem, is evident, there is no room for Man and his mission in this world. Therefore, the land “sins”. It is told to produce a fruit tree whose wood resembles the taste of its fruit and disobeys. This metaphor is a powerful image of the world as a whole. The tree is the source of the fruit. The fruit is its product, its creation. The ideal state of the world would have the wood tasting like the fruit, metaphorically teaching us that we must pay tribute to the source of the fruit. If the full taste of the fruit is contained within the wood, the fruit itself would become ancillary to its source, a mere byproduct of this delicious wood. The tasty wood would represent to us that everything has its source and that all should pay tribute to that source. But our world is one of concealment. The land, expressing its purpose, produces fruit trees that produce fruit but don’t taste like fruit themselves. The wood tastes like wood and only the fruit tastes sweet and delicious. Therefore, the tribute and acknowledgement goes to the fruit, and its source is not recognized with such fanfare. The juicy sweetness is in the creation and not in the creator. We focus on the product rather than the source. So too, in our world, we see the products and creations of Hashem, but commonly fail to recognize the Source of it all⁷.

However, despite the constant concealment and confusion, the world ultimately will return to its Source. There will be a day as described by the *pasuk*, “on that

⁶ Bereishis 1:11 and Rashi

⁷ Maharal, Gur Aryeh

day Hashem will be one and His name, one.⁸” The entire world will perceive its purpose that it has had all along, to proclaim in harmony the unity of its Creator.

With the above concept in mind, we can understand Sukkos. The ultimate destination of a Jew is the Sukkah. Besides the fact that Sukkos is our final stop on our annual holiday journey, we see Sukkos as a destination several times within the Torah. When Yaakov emerges from his struggles with Lavan and Esav, he immediately establishes a town called Sukkos⁹. When the Jews left Mitzrayim, they immediately traveled to a place called Sukkos¹⁰. The ultimate salvation of the world is described in terms of a Sukkah¹¹ and our ultimate reward is also defined metaphorically as sitting in the Sukkah of the skin of the *Livyoson*¹². Sukkos, thereby, represents the world’s ultimate destination: the return of all to *Hashem Echod*, to the recognition of our Source.

In the yearly cycle, we journey through the full gamut of holiday experiences. We become inspired by the potential latent in Pesach as a new nation is born. We are then given our mission on Shavuos as we receive the Torah. We attempt to fulfill our mission but fall short. The struggles, failings, and destruction of Tisha B’av lead us to exile, distance from G-d, and despair. However, we emerge from these struggles with hope towards a new future, toting with us the knowledge that the world has a destiny. There is going to be a happy ending to our story! We regroup, rededicate ourselves, and reconnect to G-d and our purpose on Rosh Hashana. We repent during the Ten Days of Repentance for our wrongdoings. Accordingly, Hashem atones for our sins and accepts our repentance on Yom Kippur. Only at this point, are we ready to enter into the Sukkah. We had forgotten our source, wandered astray, and now can return back to Him once again. The same progression which occurs in the macrocosm of history occurs in the microcosm of our year. Just like the world will enter back into its ideal state of perception of Hashem Echod, so too in our year we arrive back at that same point. We enter into the Sukkah, Hashem’s embrace, the time of true Simcha with a new awareness of Hashem’s sustenance, guidance, and love. The Sukkah itself represents Hashem’s guidance and love enveloping us. Through the Sukkah, we recognize Hashem in every part of life. We plant ourselves in a world living with full awareness of our Creator.

⁸ Zecharia 14:9

⁹ Bereishis 33:17

¹⁰ Shemos 12:37

¹¹ Sukkah 3b

¹² See prayer said when saying farewell to the Sukkah

Since on Sukkos, the world reconnects to its source and taps into the ideal state of Creation, we now understand the depth of the words of Chazal when they described the Esrog. Chazal tell us that the Esrog wood resembles the taste of its fruit, because on Sukkos we tap into that world of *Hashem Echod*, where everything recognizes its source. We finally experience a world where the physical does not obfuscate its source, but points right back at its source, as it should. We embrace the “*eitz pri oseh pri*” that had initially concealed its source at creation.

Also, this idea gives us an understanding of the *nisuch hamayim* offering. The first semblance of division in the world was the division of the upper waters from the lower waters. However, on Sukkos we take the lower waters and bring them as an offering on the *mizbeach*. In a sense we are reconnecting these two waters. We are sending the lower waters up again to the higher waters. In doing so, we are reversing the division that occurred on day two, propelling ourselves back into a world of Day One, the world of Hashem Echod. (See Rabeinu Bachaye, Vayikra 2:13 who cites a midrash that explains how the lower waters were upset because they had to be distant from their creator. Hashem responds that they will have privilege of being involved in *nisuch hamayim*. This implies that *nisuch hamayim* is the solution to this division.) The reason the Simcha of this ceremony was so great is because they were experiencing the Simcha of the future, the world in its ultimate state. In the final holiday of the year, they tasted the destiny of the world. They were able to experience an inkling of the feeling we will have in that final Sukkah where there will be ultimate, unending Simcha, as we bask in Hashem’s warm embrace.

Protecting Within

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“When one is in touch with his inner self, he must be alone with his thoughts.”¹³

The Chag of Succos is the conclusion to our intensified spiritual endeavors over the past month and a half, and it is the conclusion to the *Shalosh Regalim* as well. What will be of these *Chagim* that we worked feverishly to prepare for, and intently observed? How do we consolidate and preserve all that we have gathered on our journey? The answer is – Succos. Not only does Succos mark the conclusion of our spiritual journey, but it also marks the preservation and protection of that which we have worked so hard to cultivate. Succos is the protection for that which we have toiled over since Pesach. The harvest season is coming to an end and *Klal Yisrael* has a sense of their sustenance for the upcoming year. We must now take stock of ourselves and protect that which we have acquired in the tenuous spiritual realm.

In introducing a concept about Succos, Rav Wolbe¹⁴ cites a *pasuk* with Rashi's corresponding explanations (Ha'azinu 32:10-11): “He found him in a desert land, and in the wastes of a howling wilderness; He encircled him (*y'sov'venhu*), He made him comprehending (*y'von'naihu*), He guarded him like the pupil of his eye.” Rashi explains *y'sov'venhu*: “There He (Hashem) encircled them (*Klal Yisrael*) and surrounded them with clouds... and He encircled them with the bottom of the mountain for He held it over them like a barrel. *Y'vo'naihu*: there with Torah and understanding.

Rav Wolbe highlights the implications of “encirclement” by the Clouds of Glory. If there is a ‘surrounding’ from the outside, then there is an inside, or a *p'nim*, which thus reveals two different worlds to us: an outer world, the *olam ha'chitzoni* which separates one from his Creator, and the inner world, the *olam ha'panimi* which draws one near to his Creator.¹⁵ Although this idea is elusive, we will try to glean a little bit of an understanding.

The outer world is defined by beauty and appearance.¹⁶ We create the outside world. It is sustained by our desire for comfort, fame, honor, and wealth. Each generation adds on new pleasantries, luxuries, and enjoyments to attain a certain

¹³ Strive For Truth. Volume 3. 35.

¹⁴ Alei Shur, Volume 2, 446.

¹⁵ The essay explains a broader scope about Mitzvos being a protection for *Klal Yisrael* and other points as, however for the purposes of the essay the focus will be on the inner and outer worlds.

¹⁶ Ibid.

level of bliss, and yet, the effort becomes all the more futile. The outer world tends to say things like, “if only this weren’t happening right now, then everything would be ok.” “If only I earned a certain salary or had a particular job, then I would be successful.” We are constantly influenced by the environment around us, and often find that we view ourselves through the eyes of our peers. We want, and see that which we are not. By looking into the physical world and comparing ourselves to others we are only left with a sense of deficiency, leading to a deterioration of the very core of who we are¹⁷--ultimately separating us from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. If we hope to attain real honor and real value we must build ourselves internally to develop an intrinsic value.¹⁸

In contrast, it is the inner world where we must seek to define what life is about. Instead of looking towards all of the things that are outside of us, we must look inward to define our essence and realize our potential.¹⁹ It is through this process that we draw closer to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. This inner world is not sustained by pleasures, honor or wealth. Rather it is an *avodah* where we can clarify our own distinct role in this world, our own distinct worth. In the first chapter of *Mesillas Yesharim*, the *Ramchal* explains that a person must clarify and bring to reality *his* duty in *his* world - not the proverbial, generalized world. We often approach Torah as a source for a general outlook on the world, but this is not the entire truth. The Torah is a source of life for the individual and the Torah is the means by which we can build our inner world. Our inner development then enables us to grapple with the challenges presented by the outer world.

Our personal experiences are driven by our own inherited or learned characteristic traits and abilities. As a result we often find ourselves reacting to the external world from these preconditioned traits that we have already acquired. Our *middos*, our character traits, are deeply rooted within us and most of us have no understanding as to why we act or behave the way we do, and even if we were to pay attention to our *middos*, we don’t have the ability to discern which *middah* we are acting upon.²⁰ Our ability to discern our inner world and use it to pursue Torah and *mitzvos* will allow, or not allow us to achieve *gadlus* in this world. The purpose of *Torah* and *mitzvos* is to achieve our personal *shleimus*.²¹

¹⁷ *Alei Shur*, Volume 1, 37. Also see Mishlei 14:30, “...rotting of bones is envy”

¹⁸ Strive Fort Truth, “Parable and Meaning,” Volume 2, 12.

¹⁹ *Bridging the Gap*, Fertig, Avi. 118.

²⁰ *Alei Shur*. Volume 1, 162.

²¹ *Bridging the Gap*, 123.

This internal *shleimus* may seem elusive, but if there is an opening to understanding this idea it begins with internal reflection. The *ruchnius* world, the world of the spirit, rests within us, and those things that are found within must be guarded the most. This is what it is meant by *Yesov'venhu* (to surround) - when the Clouds of Glory surrounded Klal Yisrael in order to protect them. The protection being granted is a protection from the outside world. It is to protect us from pursuing that which is not part of us, or that which will harm us and take us away from our Creator. As we begin to understand the importance of knowing the composition of our emotions, *middos*, and abilities, we are able to build our inner world of *Torah* and *mitzvos* in a new and enlightening way. So the question remains, where do we go from here?

Go out from your permanent dwellings and into your temporary dwellings!²² Dwell in the Clouds of Glory of the Sukkah. Leave behind your personal luxuries, comforts, and securities so that we are able to protect this precious world we have worked so hard to plant and plow. We've planted so many beautiful crops since Pesach! Each Moed we've gained a different insight, each Ta'anis something new to tap into - we must not leave our crops in the field to rot. May this Succos be a time to reflect and a time to gather all of our *ruchnius* crops, our harvest of spiritual achievements; and may our *simcha* be a *siman* to all, that our storehouses are fully-stocked.

Chag Sameach!

²² Mesechta Succah. 2a. See Rava's opinion why a Succah can't be taller than 20 Amos.

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