

מעני תורה

ראש השנה - יום כפור - סוכות

Kol Nidrei: Foundation of Repentance

Rabbi Donny Besser
Talmud, *Mashgiach Ruchani*

Probably the most dramatic moment of the entire Jewish year comes on the eve of *Yom Kippur*. Jews who never otherwise enter the synagogue join the rest of the congregation in a solemn silence that ushers in the holiest day of the year. The *Sifrei Torah* are removed from the *aron*, and the elders of the community, dressed all in white, surround the *chazan* as he begins to chant one of the most iconic phrases of *tefillah*, "*Kol Nidrei*."

For nearly all of the most famous *tefillot*, we readily understand what it is that makes the prayer so prominent. *Shema* declares our acceptance of *HaShem's* singular majesty. *Modeh Ani* is an expression of gratitude for our very lives. *Kol Nidrei*, on the other hand, is a halachically flawed version of a technical procedure intended to nullify vows and oaths. While there is an entire *massechet* addressing the complex details of the laws of vows, and another dealing with oaths (as well as the difference between them), vows and oaths don't seem to be the sins that we have the most to worry about as we enter the *Yom ha-Din*. Why does such a seemingly mundane legal process occupy a position of such prominence?

In fact, the question is even stronger. *Kol Nidrei* is simply the communal version of *hatarat nedarim*, which we have a custom of performing in the days leading up to *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*. So when we recite *Kol Nidrei* on *erev Yom Kippur*, it is not only seemingly out of place, but a rerun!

A number of explanations have been suggested for this oddity. On a most simple level, while *nedarim* may not be the worst of our sins that require forgiveness, by their nature they are the easiest to remedy. No other *averah* has a "trick," so to speak, that allows us to almost magically recite a formula and remove it. Therefore, before we start with the hard work of *teshuvah*, with results un-

certain despite our labor, we remove whatever sins we can in advance. More symbolically, *hatarat nedarim* also serves as a model to *HaShem* for what we are hoping will happen to the rest of our *averot* through the *teshuvah* process.

Nedarim also serve as a paradigm for the power of speech. When we express regret over our misguided vows and overambitious oaths and ask *HaShem* to nullify them, we are acknowledging how badly we have fallen short of our mandate to use our tongues for good, and that we have allowed ourselves to fall in to the trap of *lashon ha-ra*, *nivul peh* (inappropriate language), *ona'at devarim* (hurtful speech) and all other types of verbal failure. Additionally, the remedy to the mistakes that we make with *nedarim* – training ourselves to stop a moment before we speak in order to say "*beli neder*," is instructive for all of the sins that we commit with our mouths. Were we to just stop for a moment or two, and think about the implications and consequences of our words, how much pain and hurt feelings could be spared!

The *Zohar* explains kabbalistically that when we recite *Kol Nidrei*, we serve as a human *beit din* to absolve *HaShem* of any of His decisions to decree against *Bnei Yisrael*. As we enter the Day of Judgment, we free Him (as it were) to ignore our sins, reconsider our punishments and grant us repentance.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth, gives a historical answer. He explains that when Spanish Jews were faced with the cruel trilemma of converting to Christianity, leaving Spain or being killed, many of them chose to make a show of converting while remaining true to Judaism in their hearts. These Jews, who had taken vows of loyalty to a religion that they didn't truly believe, chose the eve of *Yom Kippur* to use *Kol Nidrei* as a declaration of allegiance to *HaShem*; as an expression that despite their external promises to a foreign god, all of those vows should be considered null and void, as if they never occurred.

Rav Soloveitchik notes that the mechanics of *hatarat nedarim* are instructive for *teshuvah*. When someone takes a vow, there are two ways in which it can be retroactively annulled. The first requires *beit din* to find a *petach* (opening), a mistaken assumption on the part of the petitioner that implies that the entire vow was made in error. *Beit din* absolves him of his vow because of this error; had he properly understood the facts, he would never have made such a *neder*. The second method is *charatah* – genuine regret. In this model, the petitioner properly understood the nature of her vow but has since changed her mind and sincerely wishes that she had not made the *neder*. The Rav explains that these are precisely the two arguments that we make to *HaShem* when we plead for *teshuvah*. Sometimes we find a *petach* and realize the folly of our *averot* in a way that should have been apparent to us from the start. Had we only realized the consequence of our actions, had we been more conscious of the damage that we do to our relationship with the Almighty, we would never have acted so foolishly. Other times we grow, and realize now that actions that seemed like a good idea at the time were grave mistakes. This is true *charatah*. *Kol Nidrei* serves as a paradigm for these two models of *teshuvah*.

Perhaps we can suggest another possible explanation. I recall once standing on *Yom Kippur* reciting *vidui*, and as I was promising never to speak *lashon ha-ra* again I realized that I was just getting myself into deeper trouble. Am I truly never going to do it again? To cover my bases, I hastily added “*beli neder*” to the end of my expression of commitment. In reality, this is a serious mistake. When we stand before *HaShem* doing *teshuvah* on *Yom Kippur*, our commitment must be unequivocal. As we repent we must believe with absolute conviction that as we see the world in that moment, with the clarity that *Yom Kippur* allows, the possibility of a return to sin is inconceivable. Whether we are able to maintain this level of focus and lucidity of vision through the entire year is a different story. Therefore, perhaps we begin the *teshuvah* process of the *Yamim Nora'im* (with *hatarat nedarim*) and *Yom Kippur* (with *Kol Nidrei*) by cleaning the slate from the vows made during the previous year's *teshuvah*. Before we can begin to restate our bold ambitions, we must first remove the debris of the unfulfilled promises of the year gone by.

Finally, the *Ba'al Shem Tov* teaches that the famous *pasuk* in *Tehillim*, “*HaShem tzilcha– HaShem is your shadow*,” (121:5) implies that *HaShem*'s treatment of us mirrors our treatment of others. For example, a relative of mine once gave me sage advice not to be too diligent in my investigation of those who collect *tzedakah* funds.

While there may be a percentage of charlatans among the truly needy, for the few dollars that we may squander, we demonstrate a commitment to give to others without examining their merit. This earns us similar treatment from the Almighty. After all, how carefully do we really want *HaShem* to examine whether we really deserve the benefit of His gifts? Similarly, besides performing the ceremony of *hatarat nedarim* for ourselves for all of the reasons explored above, as a community we serve as the *beit din* to nullify one another's sins. We communally exhibit this *middah* of forgiving others and hope that *HaShem* is equally understanding of our own shortcomings.

May these varied interpretations of the time-honored custom of *Kol Nidrei* lead to a meaningful and successful *teshuvah* season.

Why the *Shofar*?

Gali Sadek (13)

Every year on *Rosh HaShanah* we blow the *shofar*, but why? Is it not strange that all the preparations done for *Rosh HaShanah* culminate in the simple blowing of the *shofar*? Why a *shofar* and why is it being blown?

A *masal* emphasizes the oddity of the custom. Imagine the president plans a press conference and everyone is awaiting his much-anticipated speech. He builds up their excitement by talking about the importance of the situation and then all of a sudden, instead of conveying his message with words, he starts grunting and groaning in long and short spurts. Who would understand the message? Wouldn't everyone be confused?

In *Tanach*, when *HaShem* wants to convey a message, He usually uses words. When He sent messages to Moshe, He used words. When He sent a message to Avraham, He used words. But, on *Rosh HaShanah*, *HaShem* decided that we should use a “*kol*.” Why?

In the *Gemara* that discusses the commandment of blowing the *shofar*, Rava suggests that *HaShem* said, “Recite before Me “*kingship*” in order that I should be king over you; “*remembrances*,” that I will remember you for good, and by which means? By means of *shofar*!” (*Rosh HaShanah* 34b). This teaches us that the *shofar* is a tool to remind *HaShem* of our goodness. How is this so?

To answer this, we must see how *Rosh HaShanah* corresponds to the creation of the world. The first day of *Tishrei*, which is the first day of *Rosh HaShanah*, corresponds to *yom shishi*, the day that Adam was created. When describing how mankind was created, the *Torah*

writes, "And *HaShem Elokim* formed man from the dust of the earth, and He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and he became a living being" (*Bereshit* 2:7). There, too, there was a blowing.

The blowing of the *shofar* echoes the blowing that created human life. The blowing of the *shofar* is almost as if to say, "Happy birthday!" - a phrase that not only excites young children, but people of all ages. Once we think about how it is the birthday of mankind, we must also think, "How am I using this body that I was so graciously given by God? Am I using it to do the right things?" Once we realize how we have misused our bodies, we will be eager to do *teshuvah*. The *shofar* also acts as an alarm clock that wakes us up to ask ourselves these questions. May we all be *zocheh* to wake up and realize that we were graciously given our bodies by *HaShem* and in order to thank Him, we must use our bodies appropriately.

Have a happy new year!

Source: "That Ancient Memory" by Rabbi Label Lam, Torah.org

Not Just Squash, Leeks, and Beets Liat Clark ('15)

Upon asking any kindergartener about the special foods eaten at the *Rosh HaShanah* meal, he or she is sure to respond with something along the lines of "Dip the apple in the honey, make a *brachah* loud and clear, *le-shanah tovah u-metukah*, have a happy, sweet new year!" The apple dipped in honey is among the many symbolic foods, called *simanim*, literally meaning omens or signs, which accompany our *Leil Rosh HaShanah se'udah*. Each *siman* is accompanied by a short prayer, beginning with "*Yehi ratzon milfanecha*," and including a request that has some correlation with the food.

Why do we eat these foods? Where did the custom of eating *simanim* originate? Abaye, in *Massechet Keritot* 6a, discusses the benefits of eating various foods at the nighttime meal of *Rosh HaShanah*. Abaye lists five foods that a person should eat at the "beginning of each year:" *kara*, squash; *rubi'a*, fenugreek; *karti*, leeks; *silki*, beets; and *tamri*, dates. The word "*kara*" sounds like the Hebrew word for "read;" we therefore say the *yehi ratzon* of "may our merits be read before you." "*Rubi'a*" is similar to the word "*yirbu*," meaning increase; hence the *yehi ratzon* of "May our merits increase." On leeks, we say

"may our enemies be destroyed," due to the similarity of the word "*karti*" to the word "*karet*," meaning to cut off or destroy. The *yehi ratzon* of "may our adversaries be removed" is said before we eat the beets, for "*silka*" suggests the word "*siluk*," meaning removal. Before we eat the dates, we recite the *yehi ratzon* of "may our enemies be consumed," because "*tamri*" sounds like the word "*she-yitamu*," meaning "that they be consumed." These *simanim*, along with all the other foods Jews are accustomed to eating on *Leil Rosh HaShanah*, have been selected based on their names, quick growth cycles, or sweet flavors, and all are meant to be good omens.

The question that still remains is this: What do we truly hope to achieve by eating these foods? Do we honestly believe that by taking a bite of a leek or eating a spoonful of pomegranate seeds we will ensure our fates for a good year?

In R. Eliyahu Kitov's *The Book of Our Heritage*, he quotes R. Yitzchak Arama's thoughts on the sounding of the *shofar*: "When hearing the *shofar* sounded on *Rosh HaShanah*, one is required to listen with intent...for its sounding serves to remind man to repent and return to God Who will have mercy upon him so that he will be judged not culpable on the Day of Judgment." R. Shmuel Pinchas Gelbard, in his book *Rite and Reason: 1050 Jewish Customs and Their Sources*, cites the Tur as his source for a reason for the blowing of the *shofar* during the month of *Elul*: "To arouse the people to repentance, as the verse (*Amos* 3:6) says: 'If a *shofar* was blown in the city shall the people not tremble?!'"

Perhaps our reasons for eating these *simanim* are similar to these reasons for the *shofar* blowing: to awaken our desire to do *teshuvah* ourselves. As both R. Kitov and R. Gelbard suggest, all of the *simanim* act as reminders that now is the time to be asking for good things, because man is facing judgment. Once each person realizes that he is being judged, he will see that the *simanim* are not enough; repentance is essential for his salvation on *Rosh HaShanah*.

Sources: R. Shmuel Pinchas Gelbard's *Rite and Reason: 1050 Jewish Customs and Their Sources*, Eliyahu Kitov's *The Book of Our Heritage*, Rabbi Nosson Scherman's ArtScroll Machzor for *Rosh HaShanah: Nusach Ashkenaz*, and Rabbi Moshe Schuchman's "Starting the New Year Right: A Guide to the Simanim on *Rosh HaShanah*."

Exploring *Teshuvah* through *Tefillah*

Yonina Silverman ('14)

The *aseret yemei teshuvah* are a time when we are supposed to examine ourselves and see what we can do to become better people. What have we done wrong in the past year and what can we do to change those actions in the coming year? These ten days in the month of *Tishrei* are not the only time when we look at ourselves and see how we can change as people. In fact, we do so three times a day in the *tefillah* of *Shemonah Esreh*. When looking deep into the *brachot*, we can not only make a stronger connection with *HaShem*, but we can make a stronger connection with ourselves.

In the first *brachah* we recognize that *HaShem* loves us and cares for us. We say that *HaShem* is “*koneh ha-kol*,” acquires everything. In the physical world, it makes sense for people to protect what they acquire and to do what they can to make sure nothing happens to their possessions. So too, by recognizing that we are one of *HaShem*'s possessions, we are reminding ourselves that *HaShem* loves and cares for us. That being said, if *HaShem* loves us, cares for us, and does not want anything bad to happen to us, then it is all the more important for us to protect ourselves both physically and spiritually. We must make sure we do not perform any actions that ruin our reputation as *bonei Torah*.

Another *brachah* in the *Shemonah Esreh* that follows this same theme is the *brachah* of *Hashivenu*. Towards the end of this *bracha* we say, “*va-hachazirenu be-teshuvah sheleimah lifanecha*.” What exactly does this phrase mean? Rav Kook understands *teshuvah* to mean relentlessly perusing our essential selves. In that case, the phrase in *Shemonah Esrei* would mean, “return us fully to being our essential selves before you.” When we say these words in *davening* we are asking ourselves the following: Who am I? What should I be striving for in life? As what kind of a person do I want to be known? Ultimately, this *brachah* asks *HaShem* to help us get on the path in life that is best for us, and one which He knows we can handle.

Although every *brachah* follows this same theme, the *brachah* of *Refa'enu* really stands out. Many people ask, why do we say *Refa'enu* (“Heal us...”) in the plural form, if the person *davening* may not be sick? This question can be answered in many ways. One answer is that the process of healing is not only necessary for those, God forbid, suffering from a disease. Healing is a process of getting back in touch with ourselves. Whether it is saying

something to a friend that was not nice, or giving up an opportunity to help somebody, every day we find ourselves doing things that do not align with who we are. We all suffer from some kind of spiritual illness. By asking *HaShem* to heal us, we are asking him to help us make decisions that better our reputations as Jewish people.

Shemonah Esreh is a *tefillah* that constantly reminds us of our individual identities. In the morning, midday, and at night we have a constant reminder of *HaShem* and ourselves no matter what else may be happening that day. Becoming better people, whether it is during the *aseret yemei teshuvah* or every day during our *Shemonah Esreh*, helps bring the *Ge'ulah* closer every day.

The Goal of *Teshuvah* on *Yom Kippur*

Adina Cohen ('14)

Steven Covey, author of the book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, states the following as a principle: “begin with the end in mind.” He explains that a person should envision a goal, and then work backwards to develop a plan to achieve that goal. This can apply, for example, when a person chooses to run a marathon. The marathon is the end point. When training, the most effective strategy is to create a schedule that will slowly work the runner up to marathon standards. This concept can also be used as a key to achieving complete *teshuvah* on *Yom Kippur*.

The culmination of *Yom Kippur davening* is *Ne'ilah*, which literally means locking, and refers to the time period immediately before the gates of prayer close. In the *sefer Kerem Shlomo*, Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Zelig offers a beautiful idea about the *teshuvah* process that is rooted in the end of the *Yom Kippur davening*. According to Rabbi Zelig, *Ne'ilah* focuses on the greater picture of *teshuvah*, while the rest of *davening* focuses on specific sins.

Throughout *Yom Kippur* we recite *vidui* and identify each sin that we have committed. We recognize what we did wrong and pledge to do better. However, this approach is not the ultimate end game. *Teshuvah* is not only about our deeds, but our inner change as well.

At the end of *Ne'ilah*, we daven to *HaShem* to help us, “so that we can cease the oppression by our hands.” At first glance, this line is confusing and unclear. What are we praying for?

Rabbi Zelig explains that when we sin, we are not using our body correctly. For example, *HaShem* gave a person

hands so that he/she can perform *mitzvot* with those hands. When a person steals, he/she is not using his/her hands correctly. Rabbi Zelig also stresses the idea that a person's abilities and privileges are gifts from *HaShem* and not to be taken advantage of. If a person uses his/her gifts incorrectly, *HaShem* can easily take those gifts away. During *Ne'ilah*, we not only repent for our sins, but also ask *HaShem* to aid us in always remembering that everything comes from Him and that all of our actions should be done with the awareness that *HaShem* gave us certain gifts that should be used the right way.

For most people, the *Yom Kippur* service is focused mainly on repentance for specific sins. Rabbi Zelig highlights the importance of a more comprehensive approach to *teshuvah*. Using Rabbi Zelig's approach, the process of *teshuvah* is one of reorienting a person's outlook on life. In fact, changing one's perspective is the overarching theme of *Yom Kippur*. Just like preparing us for a marathon, *Yom Kippur* slowly helps us work our way up to the goal. The repentance for individual sins is a step towards stopping future sinning in that area. In order to achieve the final goal, one more step must be taken. On *Yom Kippur* each person must strive to recognize that ultimately everything comes from *HaShem* and that therefore our actions should reflect our gratitude toward *HaShem* for all of the amazing talents and opportunities He gives us.

Can You Hear Me Now?

Daniella Steinreich ('13)

Ever since we were little, we were always taught the Rambam's idea that the *shofar* is blown to wake us up to do *teshuvah*. This idea seems correct, until it is challenged by the *shofar* blowing at the very end of *Ne'ilah* on *Yom Kippur*. At this time, the *aseret yemei teshuvah* have ended and our fates have already been written. Why, then, do we blow the *shofar* at this point?

One may think this difficulty can be solved simply. The *shofar* is being sounded to wake us up to the fact that we must repent throughout the year, whenever we sin or do anything wrong. We should not wait until *Yom Kippur* to repent for our wrongdoings.

An alternative possibility is that the *shofar* sound is referred to as a "*kol*," a word used in the *Torah* to mean a voice. The *Chafetz Chaim* learns from a *pasuk* in *Ki Tavo* (*Devarim* 26:7) where it says "*va-yishma HaShem et kolenu*," and not "*tefilatenu*," that "*kol*" means a raised voice. He learns from this *pasuk* that when we pray to

HaShem, we should do so with a raised voice to maximize the likelihood of being answered.

Yeshaya Elazar says (in his blog on ChizukShaya.com) that he learns from the *al chet of vidui* on *Yom Kippur* that when *HaShem* says we should listen to His "*kol*," He is saying that we should learn from the hardships and pleasures He gives us. His actions are His "*kol*," and therefore we must pay attention to the situations given to us by *HaShem* in order to learn the most from them. The "*kol*" of the *shofar* is sounded at the end of *Ne'ilah* to symbolize that during the year we must pay attention to *HaShem*'s signs and learn from them, because He gives them to us to keep us on the right track.

One example of a person who recognized the signs of *HaShem* is Guma Aguiar. Guma Aguiar was born a Jew but raised as a Christian until later in life, when he returned to Judaism. Years later, his company found the largest deposit of natural gas in Texas and sold it for \$2 billion. Rather than live a lavish lifestyle, Aguiar recognized what *HaShem* had given him and therefore began donating much of his wealth to organizations such as March of the Living and *Nefesh B'Nefesh*. He once said, "Only God could have blessed me with this remarkable discovery, and so now, I have to turn around and say – what can I do to bless God? What can I do to be His servant, His vessel, and repay Him for His manifold blessings and guidance?"

May we all be *zocheh* to hear the "*kol*" of *HaShem* this year and truly recognize all of the amazing things *HaShem* has given to us.

Ushpizin: Not Just Mystical Guests

Esther Simchi ('13)

On *Sukkot*, we are "visited" by seven guests called the *ushpizin*. These seven *tzaddikim* are: Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe, Aharon, Yosef and Dovid. Each day of *Sukkot* represents one day for each of these holy men. There are customs to invite these ancestors into our *Sukkot* with songs and special prayers. In some Sephardic homes, the custom is to make a place setting with *sefarim* on a specially adorned chair for the guest of the evening. But why do we invite these men into our *sukkot*? What is the significance behind the *ushpizin*?

According to the *Sefat Emet*, each day of *Sukkot* corresponds to one day of creation. In this way, with the help of our *ushpizin*, we try and bring about world peace by revisiting the creation of the world on *Sukkot*. Not only that, but each of the *ushpizin* also represents a fundamental

value in Judaism. These values help us achieve a prosperous and peaceful time. Avraham represents love and kindness. Yitzchak represents restraint and personal strength. Yaakov represents beauty and truth. Moshe represents eternity and dominance through Torah. Aharon represents empathy and receptivity to divine splendor. Yosef represents holiness and the spiritual foundation. Lastly, Dovid represents the establishment of the kingdom of Heaven on earth. When we emulate any one of these holy men and their values, it is as if we are creating a more balanced and peaceful world around us.

Additionally, the *ushpizin* are a helpful reminder to always help the needy and share all that we have. We are taught not to feed ourselves before our pets; similarly, the Rambam teaches us that we should put our guests before ourselves. In this way, we are reminded that even in a time of joy, it is crucial to remember those who are not as fortunate.

The holiday of *Sukkot* and the *ushpizin* give us the guidelines to truly better ourselves. We are taught to emulate our role models, such as the *ushpizin*, and to remember those who are not as fortunate. In this way, we will be able to bring the Jewish people one step closer to *Mashiach! Chag Sameach!*

Source: Aish.com

A Sukkah of Peace Hennie Silverman ('13)

There are multiple reasons that we sit in the *sukkah* on *Sukkot*. First, we are commanded to dwell in flimsy huts to subject ourselves to the elements, and to direct our faith away from our material comforts and towards *HaShem*. Additionally, we sit in the *Sukkah* to remind ourselves how our ancestors lived in the desert and how they trusted *HaShem* to protect them. In addition, maybe the reason we sit in the *Sukkah* is to remind ourselves that there are people who cannot enjoy the comforts of a nice home. There are many explanations as to why we are commanded to live in an outdoor hut for seven days, but there is also a deeper meaning.

Rabbi Shmshon Raphael Hirsch makes a beautiful connection. Every *Shabbos* we say in *Ma'ariv*, "*u-phros aleinu sukkat shelomecha*"- *HaShem* should spread His *Sukkah* of peace over us. The word *Sukkah* in this *tefillah* is used to show peace and harmony with our fellow man. On the holiday of *Sukkot* we leave our homes and venture into the outdoors to live in the world that *HaShem* created

for us. In addition to leaving our material possessions, we also leave behind the ties that separate us from our fellow Jews. In the *Sukkah* we all are on the same level; there are no fancy cars or imported linens to differentiate the wealthy from the poor. The holiday of *Sukkot* is one of brotherhood and camaraderie as we all join together to serve and thank *HaShem*.

The Symbolism of the Arba Minim Tamar Mendelson ('15) and Esther Alexander ('15)

One of the commandments on *Sukkot* is the *mitzvah* of the *arba minim*. The *arba minim* consist of the *etrog*, *lulav*, *hadassim* and *aravot*. The reason behind the shaking of the *arba minim* in all directions is to indicate that *HaShem* is everywhere. But why do we shake these particular *arba minim*?

Each one of the *minim* symbolizes a different type of Jew. The *etrog* has a good smell and a good taste and represents a Jew with both *Torah* wisdom and good deeds. The *lulav*, on the other hand, has a good taste but no smell, representing those Jews who have *Torah* wisdom but do not perform good deeds. The *hadassim* have a good smell but have no taste. This represents those Jews who have no *Torah* wisdom but do good deeds. The last of the *arba minim*, the *aravot* do not have a good taste or a good smell, and represent those Jews who neither have *Torah* wisdom nor perform good deeds (*Vayikra Rabbah* 30:12).

When a person shakes the *arba minim*, the *etrog* and *aravot* are placed next to each other. The *etrog*, which symbolizes a Jew that performs good deeds and learns *Torah*, is next to the *aravot*, which represents a Jew that does not learn *Torah* or have good deeds, so that the *etrog* can influence the *aravot* to do good deeds and become a better Jew and person.

In addition, the *arba minim* symbolize different parts of the body. The *etrog* represents the heart, which is where our emotions are held. The *hadassim* represent eyes because of the oval shape of their leaves. The *lulav* symbolizes the spine, which controls our actions. Lastly, the *aravot* correspond to the lips, from which we speak (*Vayikra Rabbah* 30:14).

The *arba minim* must be unified in order to attain happiness. Just as one's body parts have to work together in order to maintain the body's health, so too the *arba minim* must be used together in order to fulfill the *mitzvah*. Additionally, when Jews do the *mitzvah* of the *arba minim*, they are binding all of *Bnei Yisrael* together. Even if just

one of the *arba minim* is missing, the *mitzvah* is incomplete. This proves that every Jew plays an important role in the Jewish nation. When we shake the *arba minim* this *Sukkot*, we should have in mind that by fulfilling this *mitzvah* we are bringing the Jewish people together and are helping to hasten the coming of *Mashiach*.

Source: "The Meaning of the *Arba Minim*," Aish.com.

Third is the One With the Happiness

Temima Kanarfogel ('14)

Chag HaSukkot is known by many names, including *Zeman Simchatenu*, the time of our happiness. The *mitzvah* to be happy on *Sukkot* appears multiple times throughout the *Torah*, "*u-semachtem lifnei HaShem*" (*Vayikra* 23:40) and "*ve-samachta bechagecha*" (*Devarim* 16:14). While there is also a *mitzvah* to have joy on *Shavuot*, "*ve-samachta lifnei HaShem*," (*Devarim* 16:11), there is never a commandment to be happy on *Pesach*. In *Hilchot Lulav* (8:12-13) the Rambam says that although every holiday is supposed to be joyful, there was an additional joyous celebration that was held in the *Beit HaMikdash* on *Sukkot*. This celebration was the *Simchat Beit HaSho'evah*. The *Mishnah* in *Sukkot* 5:1-2 states that "whoever has not seen the *Simchat Beit HaSho'evah* has never seen rejoicing in his life!" The *Mishnah* goes on to depict the numerous musical instruments played and the celebratory activities done on this occasion.

Pesach and *Shavu'ot* are holidays on which we remember our freedom from slavery and receiving the *Torah*, respectively. They are grounded on two of the most momentous events in Jewish history. In contrast to this, on *Sukkot* we remember the protection we received from *HaShem* in the *midbar*. While that was also a notable time for the Jews, it does not reach the significance of the other two occurrences. And yet, *Sukkot* is the *chag* that we are repeatedly commanded to observe with happiness. What qualifies *Sukkot* to be a happier time than the other two of the *shalosh regalim*?

Another question arises about the happiness of *Sukkot*. On each of the *shalosh regalim*, we read a *megillah* that corresponds to that holiday. *Shir HaShirim* is a parable that describes the loving and intimate relationship *Bnei Yisrael* has with *HaShem*, and accordingly we read it on *Pesach* when our relationship with *HaShem* first developed. In *Megillat Rut*, *Rut* converted to Judaism and accepted the *mitzvot* of the *Torah*. Similarly, *Shavu'ot* is the holiday on which we commemorate our acceptance of the

Torah as *gerim*. A more difficult connection to make is the one between *Megillat Kohelet* and *Sukkot*. *Kohelet* is chiefly about the transience of human life and the fruitlessness of human effort. Commonly found in this *Megillah* are the words "*hevel*," which means vanity, and "*sichlut*," meaning foolishness, both derogatory adjectives describing human nature. *Kohelet*'s fairly negative tone greatly contrasts with the specifically happy tone of *Sukkot*. Therefore, why is *Kohelet* the *megillah* chosen to be read on *Zeman Simchatenu*?

"*Tachat ha-shemesh*," "under the sun," is another commonly written phrase in *Kohelet*. The words "*tachat ha-shemesh*" are used to emphasize that human abilities are extremely limited. This phrase is a reminder to us that the more times we attempt to manipulate our surroundings, the more frustrated we will feel because we are "under the sun. Some physical elements, like the sun, are out of our reach. Although this also seems to be a negative connotation, it can be transformed into a positive one.

In his book *Lights Along the Path*, Rabbi Yaakov Meir Schechter writes, "Many people long for immortality. They look for it in wealth or in fame. They imagine that it lies in making a name for themselves. However, the secret of immortality is very simple – it lies in humility, for the humbler we are before God, the more we become attached to His eternal essence, and the more we merit life in the World to Come. On the verse 'The earth exists forever' (*Kohelet* 1:4), the Sages say, 'This refers to the humble, who lower themselves to the ground.' Like the earth, they exist forever. On the other hand, as the *Talmud* says, 'an arrogant person...is not connected to God, the Source of Life.'"

We can apply Rabbi Schechter's idea that true immortality can be obtained by connecting ourselves to *HaShem* on *Sukkot*. *Sukkot* is the time when we live outside, literally under the sun, in temporary structures that reflect our acknowledgement that we are not in control of our environment and *HaShem* is. It is our opportunity to experience a time of true joy and happiness, because we connect with *HaShem* and understand Him more. We begin to recognize that He is truly in control of everything. Once we do, we will lead more productive and significantly happier lives. Because *Sukkot* allows us the chance to obtain this happiness, it is the holiday during which we abundantly rejoice.

Source: "*Yom Kippur and Sukkos: Twin Symbols of Jewish Unity*," by Rabbi Elchanan Adler.

Uncovering a Season of Unity

Shira Hanau ('13)

Typically, when one thinks about events that symbolize and inspire Jewish unity, *Yetzi'at Mitzrayim* and *Matan Torah* come to mind. These are logical unifying events, as they solidified the Jewish nation as a people and, in many ways, are the beginning of our history as a cohesive people. These events are commemorated by the holidays of *Pesach* and *Shavu'ot*, which are unifying events in the Jewish calendar. On the other end of the calendar lie three holidays that do not immediately recall unity or solidarity: *Rosh HaShanah*, *Yom Kippur*, and *Sukkot*. However, with a closer look, the theme of unity runs deeply through this season of the year as well.

On *Rosh HaShanah*, the feeling of unity is somewhat less apparent than on the other holidays. While the community gathers at *shul* to *daven*, every family goes to its own separate home afterwards and the feeling of unity is lost. The feeling of unity is accomplished, however, in the *vidui* that we say, beginning with *selichot*, but repeated many times on *Yom Kippur*. When we confess our sins in *vidui*, starting with "*Ashamnu, bagadnu, gazalnu*," we confess using plural verbs that group the entire Jewish people together. Not only do we join together in the rejoicing of *Rosh HaShanah*, but we also join together in taking responsibility for our sins on *Yom Kippur*.

Other aspects of *Yom Kippur* enhance the feeling of unity as well. The observances of the day, such as fasting, wearing white, and *davening* all day, bring everyone together. Furthermore, before we say *Kol Nidrei*, we join together in *tefillah*, even with those who have seriously sinned. We say, "*Anu matirin le-hitpallel im ha-avaryanim* - we sanction prayer with the transgressors." Not only do we encourage prayer from the righteous, but we also condone the prayer of sinners, whose prayers might normally be rejected. One of the major parts of the service in the *Beit HaMikdash* on *Yom Kippur* was the *ketoret*, the incense. On the list of the ingredients in the *ketoret* in *Vayikra*, Rashi says that even though the *ketoret* includes the bad-smelling spice *chelbonah*, the *ketoret* had a sweet smell. We also learn that leaving out a single spice from the *ketoret* is a death-penalty-carrying crime. Just as the *ketoret* is incomplete when missing a single spice, such as the *chelbonah*, so too the Jewish people are incomplete when missing a single component, even sinners.

The holiday of *Sukkot* again does not present an obvious sense of unity. Each family has its own *sukkah*, which could literally box each family into its own four walls. However, the other major *mitzvah* of this holiday, that of the bundle of the *lulav*, *etrog*, *hadassim*, and *aravot*, is a major symbol of the unity of the Jewish people. The *midrash* says that each of the *arba minim* symbolizes a different type of Jew. The *etrog*, with its pleasant taste and smell, represents the Jew with *Torah* and *mitzvot*. The *lulav*, with its taste but no smell, represents a Jew with *Torah* but few *mitzvot*. The *hadassim*, with their sweet smell but no taste, represent the Jew with little *Torah* but many *mitz-*

vot. Finally, the *aravot*, with neither smell nor taste, represent the Jew without *Torah* and *mitzvot*. Still, the *lulav* bundle is incomplete without all four pieces. Similarly, the Jewish people are incomplete without every person, including those who are sinners, even after they are given the opportunity to change on *Yom Kippur*.

Though it may not seem to be the most unifying of seasons, this season of *teshuvah* and celebrating brings the Jewish people together. During *Rosh HaShanah davening*, we stand together with neighbors and friends. On *Yom Kippur*, we formally allow the entire congregation, sinners included, to *daven* together. Finally, on *Sukkot*, we bind the *arba minim* together in our hands, symbolically binding together every member of the Jewish people. Thus the theme of unity permeates every holiday of this season and should continue to inspire Jewish unity as the other *chagim* do throughout the year.

Source: "*Yom Kippur and Sukkos: Twin Symbols of Jewish Unity*," by Rabbi Elchanan Adler.

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