

מעני תורה

תשרי

The Sukkah: A Paradigm for the Paradox of Jewish Life

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The physical trappings and practices that shape our *avodat HaShem* have been the focus of discussion and debate since the Torah was given to *Bnei Yisrael*. Whether the essence of a *mitzvah* is the actual performance of it, the understanding of what the *mitzvah* is supposed to teach us, or a combination of the two, is discussed at great length and with great eloquence by the *Nevi'im*. While much of the *avodah* of the *Mishkan* involved *korbanot*, *Yeshayahu* (*perek* 1) implies that *HaShem* doesn't want our *korbanot* if those who offer them are delinquent in their observance of *bein adam la-chaveiro*, and *Yirmiyahu* (*perek* 7) declares that *HaShem* never commanded us to bring *korbanot*! Rather, what *HaShem* wants is morality, integrity, and compassion from each one of us, and a just society as a whole. Nechama Leibowitz uses the *Yirmiyahu* source as a jumping-off point to showcase the famous debate of Ramban and Rambam as to whether *korbanot*, and indeed almost all of the physical "trappings" of *avodat HaShem*, are *a priori* what *HaShem* actually wants (Ramban) or whether they are an accommodation to what corporeal humans need in order to serve an incorporeal King (Rambam). In looking at the *mitzvah* of *sukkah*, as well as the debate in the *Gemara* (*Sukkah* 11b) as to why we sit in a *sukkah*, we can perhaps gain an integrated un-



derstanding as to how Torah Judaism is fundamentally a paradox that sets a high, even perfect, ideal, but utilizes the real, even the fallible, to achieve it.

In *Parashat Emor* (*Vayikra* 23) the Torah discusses the annual cycle of the *chagim* at length. Whereas *Parashat Pinchas* focuses on the *korbanot* associated with each *chag*, in *Emor* the various practices—eating *matzah*, waving the *omer*, and *arba'ah minim*—are highlighted. It is in *Emor* that we find the rationale for sitting in the *sukkah*: “*ba-sukkot teishvu shiv'at yamim... lema'an yeid'u doro-teichem ki ba-sukkot ho-shavti et Bnei Yisrael be-hotzi'i otam mei-Eretz Mitzrayim*; You shall dwell in booths seven days ... that your generations may know that I had the children of Israel live in booths when I took them out of the Land of Egypt” (*Vayikra* 23:42-43). The word “*sukkah*” is translated as “booth” or “hut,” and the *pasuk* indicates that it is a kind of dwelling in which one would live while traveling,

something that is both temporary and portable. The reason given for the *mitzvah* of sitting/dwelling in a *sukkah* is that all future generations must know that *HaShem* settled us in *sukkot* after He took us out of

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Mitzrayim and into the desert. A good chunk of *Massechet Sukkah* deals with what may or may not be a *sukkah* in terms of size, shape, materials and permanence. Of critical importance to the *kashrut* of a *sukkah* is that the *sechach*, that which covers the top of the *sukkah*, be made of materials which grow from the ground. Additionally, the *sechach* must provide more shade than sunlight, while at the same time allowing those who sit in it to see the night sky and stars. The *Gemara* notes (*ad loc.*) that because the *sechach* is made from things grown in the ground, it cannot become *tamei* (ritually impure). As part of the discussion of *sechach* and *tum'ah*, the *Gemara* cites the *machloket* that is more familiar to us, one side of which is brought down in Rashi (*Vayikra* 23:43): Rabbi Eliezer says that the *sukkot* that the Torah is referring to are the *ananei ha-kavod*—those supernatural clouds that protected *Bnei Yisrael* in the desert. Rabbi Akiva says that the *sukkot* are “*sukkot mamash*”—real *sukkot* that *HaShem* provided (either literally or by providing the raw materials) for *Bnei Yisrael*.

This *machloket*, coupled with the discussion of the ritual purity and organic nature of the *sechach*, provides an important paradigm for how Jewish life operates. Our religion is rooted in *emunah*: we believe that there is one omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent God, that this God created everything at *Bereishit*, and that He made a covenant with us at *Har Sinai* which we promised to accept and uphold for eternity. (See *Seforno* on *Devarim* 6:4.) While we are corporeal, material, finite beings, who exist in a material and finite world, we seek to connect with a Deity who is incorporeal and infinite. Though *HaShem* created humans with free choice, and even with a *yetzer ha-ra* (*Bereishit* 8:21), *HaShem* expects, even demands, that we choose to do what He has commanded. If we choose to do His will, *HaShem* promises to protect us and reward us; if we choose to go against His will, *HaShem* promises that there will be punishment. While no human can ever completely connect with the Divine and survive (“*Lo yir'ani ha-adam va-chai*”), we are commanded to cling to *HaShem*, to understand Him and to love Him. This paradox has been discussed by many of our greatest Rabbis, from the *Tana'im* to R. Sa'adya Gaon to the Rambam to the Ramchal, all the way to the modern giants such as Rav Soloveitchik. It seems that one of our great missions as thinking, practicing, worshipping Jews is to wrestle with the paradox and arrive at a *modus vivendi*. The Torah, the Talmud and the philoso-

phers, and our teachers, families and communities guide us, but as each of us is unique and possesses a unique *neshamah*, the journey ultimately must be taken by every individual.

The *sukkah*, indeed the whole *chag* of *Sukkot*, represents this paradox and this national-yet-personal journey. The *sechach*, that which determines whether a *sukkah* is kosher for use, must be organic; it must come from the ground. In its discussion of why the *sechach* must be organic and why it does not become *tamei*, the *Gemara* references the *pasuk* in *Bereishit* (2:6) “*ve-eid ya'aleh min ha-aretz*”—a mist arose from the ground in order to nourish the vegetation before the creation of humans. Just like *HaShem* cannot be *tamei*, so anything nourished directly by *HaShem* cannot become *tamei* while in its natural state. The *sechach*, which is organic and very finite—it withers and dries and even rots—incorporates the spirituality, purity and infinity of the Divine. And even though *Sukkot* is the *chag* to which *hiddur mitzvah*—beautification of the *mitzvot*—is intimately linked, the *sechach* may only be simple, natural materials that can be found anywhere. Not everyone can afford an *etrog*, but anyone can afford a *sukkah*. Furthermore, the *sukkah* itself must be, in essence, temporary, to reflect the *sukkot* of the *midbar*, and yet we strive to create as much a facsimile of our “real lives” in the *sukkah*, even perhaps sleeping in it. While we are permitted to bow to the exigencies of weather by going into our homes if we have to, the *sukkah* is designed to remind us of how primal our dependence on *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* really is.

The *machloket* between R. Eliezer and R. Akiva reflects this paradox and this duality. While our survival—whether in the *midbar* or in our homes—ultimately depends on *HaShem*'s protection, it also depends on the physical structures around us. Though our connection to *HaShem* must ultimately come through our *neshamot*—that infinite, intangible piece of ourselves that is also a piece and a present from *HaShem*—we also connect through ritual and objects, through buildings, geography and time. The shade—the temporariness of our lives (see Malbim)—is always greater than the sun (*HaShem*); it must be that way in order for us to live. But we must always be able to see the sun and the stars and the sky through the *sechach*, to remind ourselves that we are connected to the Creator of the universe. Whether the *sukkah*, the *sechach*, and the *arba'ah minim* are means to an end or ends in themselves, they can never be divorced from their source. It is not

that *HaShem* doesn't want our rituals; what He wants is the fusion of ritual and soul, *bein adam la-chaveiro* with *bein adam la-Makom*. The *sukkah* and the *sechach*, the *lulav* and the *aravot* are inexpensive and common; the *etrog* and the *hadasim* are rarer, finer and more expensive. We need all of them, with their paradoxes and dualities, to fulfill the *mitzvot* of the *chag*. There is a profound life lesson in all of this.

Although fallibility is inherent in being human, and although we can't reach perfection while "in this mortal coil," the standard has been set, and we are commanded and expected to strive for it. The *sukkah*, and the *chag* of *Sukkot*, represent both the paradox of our Jewish lives and a clear indication of how to live them in the service of the Creator and of all of humanity created in His image.

The Sounds of *Teshuvah*

Shira Sohn ('14)

Every year on *Rosh HaShanah* we hear the *shofar's* blast two hundred times, a hundred each day. The simple explanation for these blasts is the *Torah's* commandment to blow *shofar*. Additionally, the *Gemara* proceeds to explain why, specifically, a hundred blasts are blown. But what is the deeper meaning behind the blasts?

The Rambam famously explains that the blowing of the *shofar* arouses us to do *teshuvah*. It awakens

us from our "spiritual slumber" and reminds us to review our deeds and repent for our wrongdoings. This explanation reflects the theme of *Rosh HaShanah*, as well as the entire month of *Elul*, and it also explains why it is customary for the *shofar* to be blown every weekday from the second to the twenty-eighth of *Elul*.

Rav Saadia Gaon provides ten alternate explanations

for *teki'at shofar*, the first of which includes Rambam's classic answer with an even deeper spiritual meaning. He explains that *Rosh HaShanah* marks the beginning, the creation of the world, during which *HaShem* both created the world and became its King. The same way in which a mortal king is introduced with fanfare and trumpets, *HaShem*, the King of the universe, is proclaimed on the day we remember His creation and sovereignty with the blasts of the *shofar*.

Rabbi Label Lam strengthens Rav Saadia's connection of *Rosh HaShanah* to creation. He explains that the blowing of the *shofar* is reminiscent of *HaShem's* blowing of life into the first man. In *Bereshit* 2:7, the *Torah* explains, "Then the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." But *Rosh HaShanah* has a deeper connection with the creation of man.

With the blowing of the *shofar* on *Rosh HaShanah*, we are reminded of the first man and therefore, must think introspectively and ask whether we are living up to what God wanted from mankind: doing all the *mitzvot*

and living in a manner that resembles *HaShem's* original intentions. As a result, this is an extremely powerful call to *teshuvah* that far surpasses the simple hearing of the "wake-up" blasts. We are required to think deeply about our actions and attempt to achieve one of the main goals of the High Holidays: *teshuvah*.

The analysis of the word *teshuvah* itself leads to the same explanation of the *shofar's* purpose.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks explains that the word "*teshuvah*" does not mean repentance, despite typically being translated into English as such. In fact, he explains, *teshuvah* and repentance are opposites. Repentance is the English translation for "*charatah*." *Charatah*, or repentance, means feeling remorse and as a result, desiring to act in a completely different way in the future. *Teshuvah*,



however, means returning: the attempt to restore oneself to one's original state. This definition of *teshuvah* recalls the aforementioned idea that the blowing of the *shofar* is intended to remind us to be and act in a way that is similar to what God desired for the original man. Rabbi Sacks's explanation reminds us that everybody has an "original state" of goodness that we should strive to return to on *Rosh HaShanah*.

It is undoubtedly difficult to change one's actions entirely, but perhaps it is a little easier to uncover one's true character. With this in mind, may we all be *zocheh* to do *teshuvah* with the blowing of the *shofar* this *Rosh HaShanah*.

Musaf and Mercy

Nina Miller (16)

Musaf on *Rosh HaShanah*, which contains nine *berachot*, differs from the typical *Musaf*, which contains only seven *berachot*. The *Gemara* in *Berachot* (29a) says that the nine *berachot* correspond to the nine times that *HaShem*'s name is mentioned in the *tefillah* of Chana (*Shmuel* I 2:1-10). Chana was childless for many years and would travel to the *Mishkan* to *daven* for a son. *HaShem* finally answered her *tefillot* on *Rosh HaShanah* and Chana gave birth to a boy who grew up to become the great *navi*, Shmuel. The number nine therefore reminds us of the mercy that *HaShem* displayed on *Rosh HaShanah* when He gave children to Chana, for *Rosh HaShanah* was the day when three women – Sarah, Rachel and Chana – became able to bear children.

However, when discussing the laws of *tashlumin*, making up *tefillot* that we accidentally missed, the *Gemara* in *Berachot* (26b) and its commentators suggest a different reason for the general recitation of *Musaf* on *Shabbat* and the holidays. This discussion seems to contradict the *Gemara*'s explanation for the nine *berachot* of *Musaf* on *Rosh HaShanah*. The *Gemara* on 26b says that if one forgot to say *Ma'ariv* by mistake, he/she can say the *Shemonah Esrei* of *Shacharit* the following morning two times. And if a person misses *Shacharit*, he/she can say *Shemonah Esrei* at *Minchah* of that afternoon twice. But what if a person misses *Minchah*? Can he say *Ma'ariv* twice even though *Ma'ariv* occurs on the next day of the Jewish calendar?

If the *tefillot* correspond to the *korbanot* brought in the *Beit HaMikdash*, then we might say "*avar yomo batel korbano*," once the day passes, a person can no longer bring the *korban*. Therefore one would not be allowed to say *Ma'ariv* twice. However, we rule that because the essence of *tefillah* is *rachamim*, mercy, one would be able to make up missing *Minchah* by saying *Ma'ariv* twice, because a person can always ask for *rachamim*. *Tosafot* comments that the rule in the *Gemara*, that *tefillah* can be repeated because of mercy, does not apply to *Musaf*. He explains that this is because *Musaf* is purely a commemoration of the *korban Musaf* that was brought in the times of the *Beit HaMikdash*.

If according to *Tosafot*, *Musaf* is supposed to be completely about commemorating the *korban*, and not about *rachamim*, why does the *Gemara* on 29a say that the nine *berachot* in the *Musaf* of *Rosh HaShanah* are supposed to be a reminder of the mercy *HaShem* displayed to the three *akarot*, barren women?

We see that in contrast to *Musaf* on *Shabbat* and other holidays, *Musaf* on *Rosh HaShanah* has an additional theme. *Musaf* is a time for *mishpat*, judgment, and we should ask for *rachamim* at this point because we have had time during *Shacharit* and *Kri'at HaTorah* to gather the proper *kavanah* to do so. After reading the story of Sara *Imeinu*, who was granted a child in her old age, and after reading the *haftorah*, which contains the story of Chana, who finally gives birth to Shmuel after many years of prayer, our minds should hopefully be in the right place to ask for mercy from God. May we all have a meaningful *Rosh HaShanah* filled with heartfelt prayer, and may *HaShem* be merciful when judging us for the coming year.

Yonah's Fight Against Teshuvah

Adina Cohen (14)

The story of Yonah is a well-known one. Man runs away from God, gets swallowed by a big fish, and then repents and does as God asks. Sound familiar? The famous children's tale of Pinocchio is actually based on *Sefer Yonah*. How can it be that Pinocchio, which seems so fantastical, is based on a true story? In fact, there are rabbis who suggest that the story of Yonah was indeed a tale that took place entirely in a dream.

The proofs for this in the actual text become clear with the excessive use of the adjective *gadol*, big. In just the second verse of the *sefer*, *HaShem* tells Yonah to go to Nineveh "*ha-ir ha-gedolah*," "the big city." And then, a mere two *pesukim* later, the word is used again, twice, in describing a big wind and the storm that *HaShem* sent upon Yonah's ship. Throughout the four chapters of the *sefer*, *gadol* is used to describe things eleven times.

The question becomes, does it matter whether the story is true or simply a fantasy? Upon a close reading of the story, it is easily seen that the answer is no. In order to figure out why this is so, we first must understand the part of the story that transcends the plot. In the first *perek* of *Sefer Yonah*, *HaShem* tells Yonah to go to Nineveh and tell them to repent. What is Yonah's response? He runs away "*mi-lifnei HaShem*," "from the presence of God." But Yonah is a *navi*! He of all people should understand that man can never run away from God.

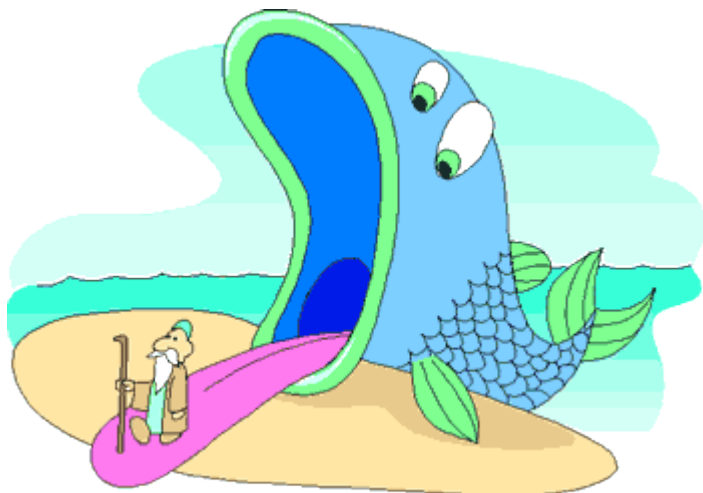
Shani Taragin explains that Yonah knew that he could not escape God. In fact, Yonah was running away to prove a point; that when people blatantly sin they should not be given the chance for *teshuvah*; they should be punished. Therefore he ignores *HaShem*'s instructions, and when the sailors try to figure out a way to stop the terrible storm, Yonah tells them to throw him overboard. He wants to make himself an example. He says, "I tried to run away from God; therefore I deserve to die." His actual death would serve to prove his point. And yet what

does God do? He makes Yonah live.

Sefer Yonah is about the clash between two philosophies on life: that of God and that of Yonah. Yonah believes in automatic cause and effect. If a person sins, he must suffer the consequences. There is no middle step; everything that occurs should be based on a person's previous actions. This philosophy allows for no *teshuvah* or *rachamim* from *HaShem*. *HaShem*, on the other hand, is merciful. He forgives us even when we deserve to be punished. When Yonah attempts to commit suicide, he is not doing it because he feels he has no life to live. On the contrary, he believes that he deserves to die and he therefore must perish. When *HaShem* saves Yonah, He is saying, "No, life is not all about cause and effect. I can show mercy and intervene with the natural course of events." Yonah is the only person in the *sefer* who fails to see this. Even the pagan sailors who throw Yonah overboard understand this, for before they toss Yonah into the sea they call out to *HaShem* and say, "*al na no'vdah be-nefesh ha-ish ha-zeh, ve-al titen aleinu dam naki: ki atah HaShem, ka'asher chafatzta asita*," "Let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood; for You, O Lord, **have done as it pleases You.**" They understand that *HaShem* works with no boundaries and can forgive even when all the arrows point to punishment.

By the end of the *sefer*, it is unclear whether Yonah really understands and agrees with the concept of *teshuvah*. In the last *perek*, *HaShem* creates a gourd to keep Yonah cool, and then the next day has a worm kill it. Yonah is upset by this and *HaShem* asks him, "If you are upset over the loss of this gourd which you put in no effort to create, then should I not also be upset over the loss of Nineveh, which is a great city?" We never are able to see Yonah's answer to God, since the statement of *HaShem* ends the *sefer*. Perhaps this is because the question is worth much more than any answer Yonah may have given. The message of *Sefer Yonah* is not the storyline, but the triumph of *HaShem*'s philosophy of mercy.

On *Minchah* of *Yom Kippur* we read *Sefer Yonah*. By the time *Minchah* occurs, the fast is beginning to wind down, and we prepare for the final call to *HaShem* during *Ne'ilah*. All that we were not able to accomplish during the day – the *tefillot* in which we could



have had more *kavanah*, the *teshuvah* process that we failed to complete – is crammed into the last few hours before it is again time to eat. The story of Yonah is one that discusses these moments, the times when although we may deserve to be treated one way, we hope and pray that we will be treated another. Therefore, as we turn to *HaShem* on *Yom Kippur* and ask for His mercy, what better way to set the mood than to read a story that embodies the merciful characteristic of God? May this *Yom Kippur* be one filled with *tefillot* that reach *Shamayim*, and may *HaShem* shower much *rachamim* on us all.

Yom Kippur, a Day of Affliction?

Devorah Saffern ('15)

Though we usually think of *Yom Kippur*, a day when we implore *HaShem* for forgiveness for our sins, as a day of sorrow, the *Mishnah* in *Ta'anit* states that *Yom Kippur* is one of the happiest days of the year. We also know that on *Yom Kippur*, one is prohibited from mourning, and that the holiday begins with a festive meal on *Erev Yom Kippur*. Because of the other prohibitions of *Yom Kippur*, however, such as the commandment to fast, and the fact that we spend the day in *shul* crying to *HaShem*, one might assume that *Yom Kippur* is a day of melancholy and despair. So which one is it? Is *Yom Kippur* a day of joy or a day of affliction?

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin explains that *Yom Kippur* in the *Torah* is described as a day of both affliction and joy, as it says in *Vayikra* 23:32, “*Ve-initem et nafshoteichem.*” He writes that the root word of “*ve-initem,*” “*anah,*” means to afflict, but can also mean to chant or sing a tune. Proof of this can be found in *Devarim* 26:5, when the *Torah* states “*ve-anita ve-amarta,*” that one should sing to *HaShem* when bringing the first fruits to the *Beit HaMikdash*. The *pasuk* uses the root word “*anah,*” to sing. Rabbi Riskin concludes that the “double meaning” of “*ve-initem*” reflects the joyous yet sorrowful feelings associated with *Yom Kippur*. On the one hand, we are sad about the transgressions for which we are atoning, but on the other hand, we experience a sense of satisfaction and happiness that we are forgiven and can start anew.

Rabbi Riskin adds that *Bnei Yisrael* felt similar intermixed joy and deep sorrow when they circled the

Golden Calf. The reason *Bnei Yisrael* made the Calf was that they thought Moshe, their leader, was gone, and felt deep sorrow for their loss. But they also felt joy as they sang and danced around their new leader figure.

On *Yom Kippur* we celebrate Moshe's receiving of the second set of *luchot* after he destroyed the first set when he saw the sin of the Golden Calf. Just as *Bnei Yisrael* did when they sinned, we have mixed emotions when standing before *HaShem* on *Yom Kippur*. Our situation is different from *Bnei Yisrael's* sinning, though, in that we externally afflict ourselves to get closer to *HaShem* and atone for our sins, so that inside we can be left with a feeling of joy, absolution, and connection to *HaShem*. In contrast, during the sin of the Golden Calf, *Bnei Yisrael* felt external joy while dancing around the Calf, but internally felt the pain of the loss of their leader.

In *The Book of Our Heritage*, Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov questions how we can discuss our lowly and impure sins in *shul* on *Yom Kippur*, on such a holy day and in such a holy place. He answers with the idea that *HaShem* actually feels joy when hearing us name our sins, because He sees the internal purification that occurs within us when admitting our wrongdoings. Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov's answer explains another way in which *Yom Kippur* is a joyous holiday, as it brings joy to *HaShem*, and can help to explain the conflicting feelings associated with *Yom Kippur*.

On *Yom Kippur*, we afflict ourselves externally, feeling the sorrow and shame of enumerating our sins before *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, but we go through this affliction to atone and purify ourselves, so that internally we can experience joy and purification of our being.

Sources: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin <http://www.ou.org/torah/riskin/yomkippur58.htm>; Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov's *Book of Our Heritage*.

A Holiday of Reflection

Temima Kanarfogel ('14)

Sukkot is a unique holiday in that the *Tanach* gives its name – the word “*sukkot*” – three different functions: the name of a *chag*, the meaning of “booths” in Hebrew, and a place name in *Tanach*. Most commonly forgotten is the third one, since there is no other holiday in the Jewish calendar whose name is also a location. Two noteworthy stories in the *Torah* include places named *Sukkot*, starting with Yaakov who names a

city *Sukkot* in his travels. Later on, *Sukkot* is the first destination that *Bnei Yisrael* reach when they leave *Mitzrayim*.

When word reaches Yaakov that his brother and nemesis, Esav, is travelling toward him with an army of four hundred men, Yaakov frantically prepares for this encounter. He strategically places his family in different sections, prays to *HaShem* for help, and sends gifts to Esav in hopes that they will soften his brother's heart. The day of the meeting finally comes, and it goes more smoothly than Yaakov could have hoped. Esav seems to have forgiven him, and departs without harming Yaakov. Yaakov subsequently travels to *Sukkot* and dwells there for 18 months (*Bereishit* 33:17, according to Rashi and Ibn Ezra's comments). In that span of time, there is no record of Yaakov rejoicing over his success with his brother, or thanking *HaShem* for the results of the meeting. Instead, after he finally leaves *Sukkot*, Yaakov settles in Beit El and builds a *mizbeach* to *HaShem*. The lack of gratitude that Yaakov shows in *Sukkot* is puzzling.

A similar story happens later on with *Bnei Yisrael* at *Yetzi'at Mitzrayim*. After *HaShem* leads the nation out of slavery, the first place that *Bnei Yisrael* stop in is *Sukkot* (*Shemot* 12:37). Although this is the first place where *Bnei Yisrael* experience true freedom, the *pesukim* do not record anything that they do to rejoice in their status as free people. Only a couple of *perakim* later, after the *Mitzrim* drown in the *Yam Suf*, do *Bnei Yisrael* sing *Az Yashir*. Yaakov and *Bnei Yisrael* both have delayed reactions of joy and gratitude while they dwell in a place called *Sukkot*. This is particularly ironic because *Sukkot* is the holiday when we are commanded by the Torah to be happy and rejoice more times than any other *chag*.

Perhaps our celebration of *Sukkot* is a *tikkun*, repair, of the location *Sukkot*, a place where Yaakov and *Bnei Yisrael* were not yet ready to express their gratitude to God. The reflection process that Yaakov and *Bnei Yisrael* delayed is one that we are meant to perform on *Sukkot*. While this reflection may appear superfluous, since we are entering *Sukkot* after the *chagim* of *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*, the holidays when we reflect the most, it is absolutely necessary for us to do so again. We use the *Yamim Noraim* to pray that *HaShem* should give us an additional year so that we can carry

out His laws. Once we arrive at *Sukkot*, our prayers have concluded. It is time for us to finally prove our self-proclaimed *teshuvah*. The *chag* of *Sukkot* is our first opportunity to reflect on what we promised, and decide to physically carry out those promises. We thank *HaShem* for giving us another year and we celebrate our ability to fulfill our promises.

Another name for *Sukkot* is *Chag Ha-Asif*, because this is the season in which we gather the food that *HaShem* has granted us. The harvest is the perfect time to celebrate *Sukkot*. *HaShem* has given us what we need and asked for. We must pause, reflect on what He has given us, and then react with gratitude and happiness. Both our success in our abundant sustenance, and our opportunity to prove that we are worthy of another living year, are reasons to reflect on these *brachot*, and then rejoice over them. *Sukkot* gives us the chance to both reflect and rejoice.

What Do We Commemorate on *Sukkot*?

Margalit Silver ('16)

Of all the holidays that we celebrate, there are three that are placed in a separate group from the rest and given a special title. The *Shalosh Regalim* – *Pesach*, *Sukkot* and *Shavu'ot* – are the three holidays where the Jewish people would make *aliyah la-regel* – that is, they would flock from all corners of *Eretz Yisrael* to gather at the *Beit HaMikdash* in *Yerushalayim*. *Sukkot* seems to be the odd one out of the three *chagim*. The other two, *Pesach* and *Shavu'ot*, are associated with specific special moments in Jewish history – *Yetzi'at Mitzrayim* and *Matan Torah*, respectively – but *Sukkot* does not seem to be. In other words, what do we celebrate on *Sukkot*?

On *Sukkot*, one of the main *mitzvot* of the holiday is to live in a *sukkah*. In the *Torah* it is written, “You shall dwell in booths seven days... that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt...” (*Vayikra* 23:42-43). The reasoning behind sitting in *sukkot* is written straight out in the *pasuk*. We sit in *sukkot*, the *Torah* explains, to represent when *HaShem* brought *Bnei Yisrael* out of Egypt and to commemorate the huts, or *sukkot*, that the Jews lived in while they were in the desert over the course of forty years.

Another significant *mitzvah* of *Sukkot* is the *arba minim*, the four species. In *Vayikra*, it says “And you shall take

on the first day the fruit of a goodly tree, date palm fronds, the branch of a leafy tree, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days" (23:40). The *mitzvah* of the *arba minim* is to take the *lulav*, assembled with *hadasim* and *aravot*, and make a *brachah* on it alongside the *etrog*. At first glance these plants seem to represent the agricultural aspect of *Sukkot*, the holiday that marks the end of the farming season with the gathering of the crops. *Ne'ot Kedumim*, the Biblical Landscape Reserve in Israel, notes that not only are these species a celebration of bounty, but they also correspond with *Bnei Yisrael's* beginnings as a nation. The *lulav*, or date palm fronds, signify the forty years that *Bnei Yisrael* wandered around in the wilderness of Sinai, since the *lulav* grows in desert oases. The *aravot*, or willow branches, grow along the Jordan River, where *Bnei Yisrael* camped right before entering *Eretz Yisrael*. The "branch of a leafy tree," which *Chazal* defined as the myrtle branch, or *hadasim*, represents the trees with thick foliage that *Bnei Yisrael* found when they arrived in *Eretz Yisrael*. These trees needed to be cleared for *Bnei Yisrael's* transition from shepherding to farming. Lastly, "the fruit of a goodly tree," which the Talmud teaches is the *etrog*, or citron, epitomizes the peak in Israeli agricultural growth, since the *etrog* requires much patience to be cultivated in Israel.

Sukkot is an overview of our history as a blossoming nation and celebrates how our success was and still is nurtured by *HaShem*. *Pesach* and *Shavu'ot* are connected to one another because of the way Jewish history played out; the Jews left Egypt and not long afterward received the *Torah*. This, however, is a linear connection. The two *chagim* form a line between each other instead of the circle that represents a continuous cycle. *Sukkot* is the holiday that brings the two from the linear connection to a cyclical connection. It refers to the beginning of Jewish history with the *mitzvah* of *sukkah*, but it also represents the continuous history of the Jewish people with the *mitzvah* of the *arba minim*. Just as a circle has no end, so too Jewish history will continue to be made. As we sit in our *sukkot* this *chag*, we should not only remember all that *HaShem* did for our ancestors long ago but also what He continues to do for us today.

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