



THE SUKKAH: A PLACE TO GAIN PERSPECTIVE

Rabbi Yaakov Ettlinger (Germany, 19th century), *Bikkurei Yaakov* no. 625, in his opening comments to the laws of Sukkah, notes the following:

ישמחו הישרים ויגילו האשורים אף דלי נחלת ישראל החג הקדוש הזה הנקרא יום שמחתנו ושמחתו מכופלת ויזהרו מאוד לקיים מצות סוכה שמספר שמה צ"א כמספר שני שמות הקדושים שכוללם אמן וקדושתה מכופלת והמקימה כהלכתה יכפלו שכרו מן השמים.

The upright should rejoice ... for the holy holiday that is referred to as "days of simcha" and its joy is doubled. One should be exceedingly careful to fulfill the mitzvah of sukkah, as its numerical value is 91, the same as two holy names of G-d, which also is the numerical value of "amen," and its holiness is double,

therefore those who fulfill it according to its laws will receive double reward from Heaven.

Why does this specific mitzvah of sukkah earn us double reward? Why is this mitzvah singled out as one that we commemorate each year for seven days and not the other miracles (the well, mana bread) we received in the desert?

Rabbi Yerucham Olshin, *Yareach L'moadim* (Sukkos no. 25) cites a passage from Rabbeinu Bachya, *Kad Hakemach*, Sukkah, to provide an approach to understanding the reference to a double reward. We are all familiar with the debate between R' Akiva and R' Elazar (*Sukkah* 11b) about whether the

miracle we commemorate is for actual huts that the Jewish People lived in the desert or the Clouds of Glory that accompanied us in our travels. R' Bachya takes the approach¹ that both opinions are true, and explains that sukkah has an "open" (*nigleh*) expression as well as a "hidden" (*nistar*) expression. The commemoration of the physical huts is the "open" expression of the mitzvah, whereas the Clouds of Glory is the "hidden" expression.

Perhaps we can elaborate on this approach with the help of two puzzling halachos in the Rambam:

כיצד היא מצות הישיבה בסוכה, שיהיה אוכל ושותה ודר בסוכה כל שבעת הימים בין ביום בין בלילה כדרך שהוא דר בביתו בשאר ימות

השנה, וכל שבעת הימים עושה אדם את ביתו עראי ואת סוכתו קבע שנאמר בסוכות תשבו שבעת ימים.

What is the mitzvah of sitting in the sukkah? To eat and drink and live in the sukkah seven days, day and night, as one would dwell in their homes the rest of the year; and all of these seven days a person is to make their home temporary and their sukkah their permanent dwelling, as the verse states, "In sukkot you are to dwell for seven days."

Hilchos Sukkah 6:5

אוכלין ושותין וישנין בסוכה כל שבעה בין ביום בין בלילה ... ומותר לשתות מים ולאכול פירות חוץ לסוכה, ומי שיחמיר על עצמו ולא ישתה חוץ לסוכה אפילו מים הרי זה משובח.

We eat, drink, and sleep in the sukkah all seven, day and night, and it is permitted to drink water and eat fruit outside of the sukkah, and one who is stringent and does not even drink water outside of the sukkah is praised.

Hilchos Sukkah 6:6

Why does the Rambam mention eating and drinking in the sukkah in both halachos? Would it not be simpler to plainly state that the mitzva is to move into the sukkah and an expression of that is by eating in the sukkah -- all in one halacha?

Rabbi Soloveitchik² understands that the Rambam views the mitzvah of sukkah as one that contains two components: (1) A general mitzva of "living in the sukkah"; (2) A specific

mitzva to eat in the sukkah.³ We have a specific mitzva to eat and drink in the sukkah, but there is a further obligation to make the sukkah our central focus for seven days -- in the words of Rabbi Michael Rosensweig,⁴ to make the sukkah our family "headquarters" for seven days. In fact, this is how we fulfill the simple meaning of the pasuk (Devarim 16:13) *Chag HaSukkos ta'aseh lecha shivas yamim* — make a holiday of Sukkos for yourself for seven days. Rabbeinu Manoach⁵ emphasizes this point in the fact that the bracha is formulated as "*leishev basukkah*" (to dwell in the sukkah) and not "*le'echol basukkah*" (to eat in the sukkah).

In a striking approach, Rabbi Avraham Ehrlinger, *Birkas Avraham, Sukkah* 9a, explains a debate in the Gemara -- whether one can fulfill the mitzva with a sukkah built on Chol Hamoed -- as revolving around this very issue. While the normative opinion is that it is permissible, according to R' Eliezer, we cannot fulfill the mitzvah, since a sukkah must be constructed prior to the holiday as a structure that will be used for all seven days, and the *kiyum hamitzvah* (the fulfillment) takes place once we have dwelled in the sukkah for seven consecutive days.⁶

Indeed, the Ran, *Sukkah* 23a, notes that the reason we cannot take apart our sukkah after eating the final meal on the seventh day (Mishna, *Sukkah*

48a) has nothing to do with the fact that perhaps we may change our mind and desire to eat another meal or take a nap later in the day (as Rashi there s.v. *Lo* explains), but rather part of the mitzvah to build a sukkah is to have it standing all seven days, as our home.

Borrowing Rabbi Soloveitchik's terminology from other areas of halacha,⁷ perhaps we can go one step further and suggest that there is a *ma'aseh mitzvah* (a mitzvah act), expressed by eating a specific amount of food in the sukkah on the first night, and a *kiyum hamitzvah*, the purpose of the mitzvah, which is fulfilled by "building" a perspective on life that Hashem runs the world through our moving into a flimsy hut for seven days. Spending significant time in the sukkah reinforces our faith in Hashem and understanding that there is more to life than what we physically see in front of us. Perhaps this is hinted to by the two names of Hashem referenced by Rabbi Ettlinger. The outside letters of סוכה are ס,ה, equalling 65, the numeric value of א,ד,נ,י, the name of Hashem that we connect with as the "Master," which is more clearly expressed in the physical world. The inside letters are ה,ו, -- the same numeric value of 26 as ק,ו,נ,ק [where ה=ק] -- representing our inner relationship with Hashem.

Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg, *HaKesav VeHakabbalah* (Vayikra 23:43), notes that the word ישב connotes a sense of calmness and serenity, as the pasuk says in Shoftim 5:16, "*lamah yashavta bein hamishpasayim*" — why did you stay among the sheepfold — an image that takes us to the soft, lush hilltops tending to our flock. The sukkah is supposed to create a space for us to feel safe, serene, and confident --

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that Hashem tends to our needs, as a shepherd to His flock.

Coming on the heels of the Yamim Noraim, deep days of prayer, introspection, and contemplation, we enter the sukkah to perform actions that represent the values we read in our siddur and concepts of faith that we reflected on, with hopes of committing to be better Jews in the coming year. The sukkah concretizes these notions and beliefs.

Many have noted that the sukkah is a mitzva that we fulfill with our entire bodies and is all-encompassing, literally and figuratively. The sukkah may be transient in structure, but its ideas and lessons are supposed to be firm in our hearts and minds. Sukkah reminds us to be cognizant of Hashem in all our dealings, *bechol derachecha da'ehu* — in all of your ways know Him (Mishlei 3:6). Even when we

conduct mundane actions such as eating and sleeping, if done within the proper context and mind frame, they become mitzvos.

Therefore, the double reward afforded to us through the medium of the sukkah lies in our ability to connect to this mitzva, through both our actions and intentions. The more time we spend in the sukkah, the greater opportunities we will have to contemplate its message and meaning. Just as when we respond to a blessing with a heartfelt *אמן* — the numerical value of *סוכה* — by affirming its truth, by moving our family headquarters to the sukkah for seven days, we actively affirm the notion of our dependence on Hashem and our trust in Him.

Endnotes

1. See also Netziv Vayikra 23:43.

2. *Reshimos Shiurim, Sukkah* 28b, p. 105.

3. Perhaps the Rambam was bothered by the formulation of the passuk in Vayikra. We know that on a Torah level, the mitzva to eat in the sukkah is only the first night (similar to matza on Pesach), yet the passuk (Vayikra 23:42) clearly states *בַּסֻּכּוֹת תֵּשְׁבוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כָּל בַּסֻּכּוֹת תֵּשְׁבוּ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁבוּ בַּסֻּכּוֹת הֲאֵזְרוּחַ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁבוּ בַּסֻּכּוֹת?* The Rambam would answer that the concept of transferring one's home to the sukkah is indeed a seven-day mitzvah. For further elaboration on this and how this expresses a difference between the mitzvah of sukkah throughout Sukkos and that of matza on Pesach see an important article from Rabbi Rosensweig here: http://torahweb.org/torah/2019/moadim/rros_sukkos.html.

4. <https://www.yutorah.org/sidebar/lecture.cfm/764801/rabbi-michael-rosensweig/yeshiva-b-succah/>.

5. Commentary on Rambam Sukkah 6:7.

6. Whereas the other opinion assumes that each day is a separate mitzva not contingent on the rest — similar to the question related to whether Sefiras HaOmer is one mitzva or 49 mitzvos, or 49 acts of mitzvah with a common fulfillment.

7. *Al Hateshuva* pp. 41-45.

