

CHAG SAMEA'ACH. *These are the first days of Sukkot, 15-16 Tishrei 5787.*

TORAH DIALOGUE (p. 313 Birnbaum Machzor)
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1. Rav Soloveitchik wrote that the choice of Torah readings for the first two days of Yom Tov follow a pattern. On the first day we read of the historical narrative of the holiday; and the second day we read of the calendar festival description in the Torah. On this particular Yom Tov of Sukkot, both of these portions happen to be the same selection. Only in the Torah narrative of Parshat Emor is the historical description of Sukkah, and the mitzvah of Lulav and Etrog. Coincidentally this is also the only time that all five biblical holidays are mentioned in proper calendar order. So, even though the Torah reading is the same for both days, the first day is a description of the historical narrative, i.e. that Hashem had the Jewish people living in booths while traveling through the desert; and the second day is the calendar insertion of this holiday describing the mitzvot of the holiday itself.

2. This is the only place in the Torah where the mitzvah of the Four Species is mentioned. But actually the Torah never really mentions them by the names by which we know them. There is no mention of the words Lulav, Etrog, Haddassim, and Aravot. Instead, the Torah provides details about them, leaving the rabbis in the Talmud to derive their exact identities. The Etrog is referred to as the "fruit of an Eitz Hadar (a beautiful tree)." In the Talmud (Sukkah 35a) the rabbis explain that the verse describes a fruit as coming from a beautiful tree, and this must mean that the tree has to produce a fruit, and its wood should be equal in taste. This is quite difficult for us to comprehend. In his commentary, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (on Emor 23:40) wrote "the ethereal material which gives the aroma to the fruit exists already in the wood and leaves of the tree, and gives them the taste of the fruit." What is bothering Rav Hirsch is what would bother all of us, mainly that we do not eat the wood, even though some animals might. Today we are seeing the development in food technology in which companies are extracting foods and extracts from the wood and foliage of a plant, not only benefiting from the fruit. The sugar cane is an example, of which I have firsthand knowledge. There is a company here in Florida that is using the green top of the sugar cane plant, which is always discarded, and now it is being dried and reconstituted as a liquid. The benefit of this is that it removes the aftertaste from aspartame. This is a multi-million dollar company in the making, as soon as the food industry will begin to take advantage of it. This is what I see as the true essence of the Talmudic statement. When God creates the tree in His perfect form of creation, He is not only giving us the fruit to benefit from, but the tree itself. (RED)

3. In this narrative discussing Sukkot, the paragraph is broken into two, seemingly stating that the Sukkah holiday is on the 15th of the 7th month (Tishrei), and then it goes on to describe elsewhere that it is the Festival of the Harvest. The Netziv points out that Yeravam, the first king of the Kingdom of Israel (the Ten Tribes of the North), emphasized the point that the holiday is supposed to be linked to the agricultural cycle of the year. One year King Yeravam patterned a holiday after Sukkot in the 8th month. The Netziv commented that the harvest came out late that year, and the king decided to push off Sukkot. While Yeravam's logic was reasonable, the Torah works on "eternal statutes" and not human logic. I never truly gave this comment much thought until the year of the Yom Kippur war in 1973. Being wartime, there were plenty of Jewish organizations here in America who wanted

to put off Sukkot until things settled down in Eretz Yisrael. I can actually understand that line of thinking in an emergency situation for the people living in Israel, but this effort was in America, where we are only in support mode for the people of Israel. This would explain how the Torah needs to be specific in identifying the date of the holiday, which is to take place on the 15th day of the 7th month. Although the holiday is linked to the harvest in Israel by virtue of our taking the Four Species, the Torah nevertheless tells us that it is also linked to a historical commemoration highlighted by the Sukkah aspect so that of the two mitzvot one is more historical and the other one is more agricultural, and they must come together. (RED)

4. One year, when the people of Vilna were experiencing difficulties in obtaining kosher Etrogim for Sukkot, the students of the Vilna Gaon searched far and wide attempting to locate a kosher Etrog befitting for their rabbi. When they succeeded in finding such an Etrog they encountered a strange problem. The owner of the Etrog was going to sell the Etrog only on the condition that he received the reward for the mitzvah, which would otherwise have gone to the Vilna Gaon. Upon hearing this the Vilna Gaon was overjoyed, and said, "I have waited an entire lifetime to have the opportunity of performing a mitzvah completely Lishmah – without intentions of receiving any reward in this world or in the world to come. Finally my Creator has brought to me such a precious Etrog under circumstances where it could be performed for the sake of heaven."

5. The Sukkot holiday is supposed to be the happiest of all holidays on the calendar. The simplest explanation for this is that it is the culmination of all the harvests that have taken place in the agricultural cycle. Hence it is always good to celebrate and praise Hashem for the bounty of good food, and it is done more easily when one is satiated and there is food in the cupboard and the silos are full. Yet one of the most glorious pictures that I have seen of the Sukkot holiday is one taken in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur war, with soldiers surrounding their tank in the Golan davening with a tallit over their heads, holding their Lulavim and Etrogim. That image will always be in my mind when it comes to thinking of the Sukkot holiday. Whereas the holiday is supposed to indicate fullness and satiety, it is amazing how many times Jewish people throughout the world have found the courage and fortitude to celebrate even when things are not so great. Another image described in book form is a picture drawn of Jews in a concentration camp during the Holocaust, where they put barrels slightly apart from each other and then took twigs and placed the twigs in between, atop the barrels. Late at night when the Nazis were not looking, they would individually run out to their makeshift Sukkah with a couple of crumbs and make a brachah. Hashem should note the courage and fortitude and bravery that many Jews demonstrated in terrible times to fulfill the mitzvah. I don't know how much simcha there was in the mitzvah that they performed in those days, but it is a good idea for us to reflect upon it in our days of abundance and prosperity. (RED)

6. Halachically we are required to move out of our homes and reside in our Sukkah. We are to eat and sleep and learn and socialize in the Sukkah, and not in our homes. In the north we didn't do it because we found the Sukkah uncomfortable, and oft times quite cold. I remember days when we had an electric heater in our Sukkah in Washington, DC. In the early years of our marriage when we spent Sukkot with my in-laws in Boston, going to the Sukkah in overcoats and gloves was commonplace. We therefore never gave any thought to sleeping there. Here in the south the Sukkah is too hot. Having an air-conditioned Sukkah is a rare novelty, and yet from time to time we encounter such

situations. Are we so spoiled not to be able to fulfill the mitzvah as the Sages described it? I believe not. The Sukkah can be lived in when it is comfortable for us to live in it. When we are exempted from living in it, we are still required to spend time in it and revere it in a way in which we have company, and at least have our meals in the Sukkah. The lessons of a Sukkah are multi-layered. We demonstrate in the Sukkah how we are subjected to the physical elements that are in God's control. The message is clear. Our life in the world is also in the same category. We are subjected to the elements surrounding us and often these are not pleasant and can be difficult. Therefore we look heavenward from our Sukkah, see the heavens and see the stars, and place our trust in Hashem. (RED)

7. The simcha of Sukkot consists of two mitzvot of simcha. The first simcha was based on V'Samachta B'Chagecha, you shall rejoice in your festivals. The second mitzvah of simcha was the obligation to be happy before Hashem for seven days. The Jew fulfills the first mitzvah of simcha through physical comforts, through eating elaborate meals, drinking wine, fruits, gifts, nuts, and giving jewelry to the women. At this time the Jew is happy because he has a full wine cellar, and sufficient provisions to make it through the coming winter. It was a successful year, therefore we are happy. This type of simcha is readily appreciated by other nations as well. For example, the holiday of Thanksgiving was based on this very principle, of giving thanks for the abundance that we enjoy. Hence there is an international aspect to the holiday of Sukkot, for it can apply to everyone. In truth the Jewish people did not enjoy this prosperity on their land for many years. Yet they still celebrated no matter where they were.

8. It is the second simcha of the 7 days that is most unique. This was the Simchat Beit HaShoeva. This simcha was not celebrated with wine, but with water. Simchat Beit HaShoeva was celebrated specifically at night. The simcha came to an abrupt halt at daybreak. The simcha could only take place at night when the people would exclaim, "We are to Hashem and our eyes are to Hashem" and the Leviyim would recite Shir Hama'alot. What sparked the people to burst forth in such joy? It was not the food or the meat, but rather the fact that it was in the presence of Hashem. Rejoice before God. A Jew will spontaneously burst out in rejoicing when he feels that he is in the presence of Hashem no matter how difficult his personal situation might be. At that time the Jew feels that he is sitting in the shade of Hashem (Tzila D'm'hemnuta), protected from the elements.

9. On these days of Sukkot, we have the ritual of Hoshanot all 7 days when we circle the Sefer Torah placed at the Bimah with our Lulav and Etrog. On Simchat Torah we dance with the Sifrei Torah around an empty Bimah. The image that Rav Soloveitchik would try to portray is that Hashem is standing in His glory at the Bimah, and we dance around Him together with the Sifrei Torah. This is symbolic of the Midrash that promises that in the days of the ultimate redemption Hashem will make a Machol, a dance for the righteous, with Hashem in the center. We have to bring the youth, the Aravot, the willows, into the Mikdash and dance around Hashem to prepare for that day. May it come soon in our time! The Rav also would talk about concentric circles, meaning that we could all be participants in this mitzvah, even if we are not dancing altogether in one ring. Nevertheless, the focal point is the middle. As long as we are all together, focused and attentive to what unites us, which is what exists in the middle of our circle, then all will be well. On these first days of Sukkot we parade with our Lulavim and Etrogim and the Torah is in the middle. Concentrate on what is in the middle and you will see

exactly what unites us and gives us the spiritual lift that we require.

QUESTIONS FOR FIRST DAYS OF SUKKOT 5787

1. May you slaughter a bull and its calf on the same day?
2. According to the Torah, how many festival days are there?
3. Which two holidays are the only ones that start on the 15th day of the month?
4. Name the Four Species used on Sukkot.
5. What are the two definitions of the word Sukkot?
6. What is the nickname for Sukkot used in our prayers?
7. What two major prohibitions of Shabbat that are permitted on Yom Tov?
8. Why do we add a day to the holiday outside of Eretz Yisrael?
9. What is the S,Chacham, the covering of the Sukkah, made out of?
10. What are the walls of the Sukkah made out of?
11. Why did Hashem want to add a day to Sukkot (Shemini Atzeret)?
12. The Torah states that we should take the Lulav and Etrog for one day. After the destruction of the Temple, it was established to take the Etrog for the entire week of Sukkot. Who established this law?
13. Relationships
 - a) Batsheva - Shlomo
 - b) Yishmael - Nevayot
 - c) Lavan - Yehudah

ANSWERS FOR FIRST DAYS OF SUKKOT 5787

1. Yes you may. The prohibition in the Torah is only for a mother and her offspring.
2. 18.
3. Pesach and Sukkot.
4. Lulav, Etrog, Haddassim, and Aravot.
5. Booths and the Clouds of Glory.
6. Zman Simchateinu, the Time of our Simchah.
7. Cooking and Carrying.
8. Because messengers could not reach far distances to inform those Jews when Rosh Chodesh was.
9. From foliage that grows from the ground and is now cut off from the ground.
10. From anything, but to be strong enough to withstand a normal wind.
11. He found parting from His people difficult, so He asked for one more day.
12. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai.
13.
 - a) Mother Batsheva
 - b) Father Yishmael
 - c) Grandfather Lavan