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a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

The Festival of Sukkos – a History

PARSHAS EMOR 5777

(*The following is based largely on a dissertation contained in K'motzei Shalal Rav, parshas Emor, pp. 313-316.*)

One of the main features of this week's *parshah* is the extensive section involving the various *mo'adim* (festivals). The Torah employs a fairly basic pattern in treating this subject: it lists a given festival, mentions its unique service or practice and proceeds to the next. Thus when discussing Pesach, for example, the Torah includes the directive of **שְׁבַעַת יָמִים מְצֻוֹת תְּאַכְּלֵי** "Seven days shall you eat matzah" (*Vayikra* 23:6). Such is the case with regard to Shavuos, Yom Kippur, and all the rest.

Just an Afterthought?

The festival of Sukkos seems to be the exception, where the Torah presents a curious departure from the pattern described above. To better appreciate the extraordinary nature of the Torah's treatment of this *yom tov*, it is worthwhile to cite here a fuller version of the section involving Sukkos as it appears in the *parshah*:

...בְּחִמְשָׁה עֲשֶׂר יוֹם לְחַדֵּשׁ הַשְׁבִיעִי הַזֶּה חַג הַסְפָּכוֹת שְׁבָעַת יָמִים לְד' בַּיּוֹם הַרְאָיוֹן מִקְרָא־קָדְשׁ ... בַּיּוֹם
הַשְׁמִינִי מִקְרָא־קָדְשׁ ... כָּל־מְלָאכָת עֲבָדָה לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה, אֱלֹהָ מוֹעֵדִ ד' אֲשֶׁר־תִּקְרֹאוּ אֶתְם מִקְרָאֵי קָדְשׁ ... אֲךָ
בְּחִמְשָׁה עֲשֶׂר יוֹם לְחַדֵּשׁ הַשְׁבִיעִי ... תַּהֲגוּ אֲתִיכָּג ד' ... וְלֹקְחָתֶם לְכֶם בַּיּוֹם הַרְאָיוֹן פָּרִי עַזְּ קָדְרָ כְּפָת תְּמִרִים
וְעַגְרָ עַזְּבָת וְעַרְבִּינְחָל וְשִׁמְחָתָם לְפָנֵי הָאֱלֹקִיכֶם שְׁבָעַת יָמִים ... בְּסִכְתַּת תְּשִׁבּוּ שְׁבָעַת יָמִים ... לִמְעֵן יְקֻעוּ
דָּרְתִּיכֶם כִּי בְּסִכְתַּת הַוּשְׁבָתִי אֲתִיכָּנִי וְשָׁרָאֵל בְּהַזְּכִירָאֵי אַוְתָם מִאָרֶץ מִצְרָיאִים ...

"...On the fifteenth day of this seventh month (Tishrei) is the Festival of Sukkos for seven days to Hashem. On the first day there is a holy convocation... (and) on the eighth day there is a holy convocation... you shall perform no labor thereon. **These are the festivals of Hashem, which you shall declare them as holy convocations...** But on the fifteenth day of the seventh month... you shall celebrate the festival of Hashem... You shall take for yourselves on the first day an *esrog*, *lulav*, *hadassim*, and *aravos*, and shall rejoice before Hashem your G-d for seven days... You shall dwell in *sukkos* (booths) for seven days... so that your generations shall know that I placed B'nei Yisrael within *sukkos* when I took them out of the land of Egypt..." (*Ibid.* v. 33-43).

A number of points in the above passage may strike us as puzzling. The festival of Sukkos, as we know, is replete with *mitzvos* – namely, the taking of the four species and dwelling in the *sukkah*. And yet – in contrast to the other *mo'adim* – here, the Torah (initially) makes no mention of these *mitzvos* when introducing the festival! It merely states that there is a work stoppage on the first and last days of the holiday. This is followed by what appears to be a concluding statement, encompassing all of the festivals dealt with in the *mo'adim* section: "**Eileh mo'adei Hashem... These are the festivals of Hashem...**" And then – after "sealing" the topic of the festivals – the *passuk* proceeds to enumerate the *mitzvos* of this last festival almost as an afterthought, delineating the particulars of the four species and dwelling within *sukkos*. What can it all mean?

What this indicates, as a number of commentators point out, is that there was indeed a certain uniqueness associated with this festival. The central issue, as we shall see, relates to the

following question: Did B'nei Yisrael themselves fulfill the *mitzvos* of Sukkos while yet residing in the desert?

Double Covering

All signs seem to point to the conclusion that, in fact, the actual *practice* of taking the four species and dwelling in the *sukkah* only became binding once Yisrael entered into the Land. This would account for the apparent aberrancies described above. The Torah initially omits reference to the *mitzvos* of the Sukkos festival for the simple reason that they were not immediately applicable to the direct audience of the commandments listed in this section – that is, B'nei Yisrael in their pre-Eretz-Yisrael state. Thus, only after “concluding” the topic of the festivals as it relates to this population did the *pesukim* proceed to list the *mitzvos* of *lulav* and *sukkah*. This was not an afterthought, but represents a shift in audience – namely, future generations.

The reason why the mitzvah of the four species did not apply in the desert can perhaps be gleaned from a teaching of the Rambam. The Rambam explains in *Moreh Nevuchim* that this mitzvah actually represents the tremendous joy of B'nei Yisrael upon arriving in the Land. They had just traversed an arid desert, devoid of growth and produce. In recognition of the great bounty to which, in contrast, they were now exposed in Eretz Yisrael, Hashem commanded that they serve Him with the best fruits and most fragrant and pleasing vegetation. In any event, this matter would clearly seem to be relevant only upon their departure from the wilderness and their entry into the Land.

What of the mitzvah of *sukkah*? Why was this mitzvah not binding while B'nei Yisrael were still in the desert? Based on a teaching of the Mabit (*Beis Elokim, Sha'ar Hayesodos ch. 37*), it would appear that a halachic consideration was involved. The issue relates to the essence of the *sukkah*'s covering, which must be the sole item intervening between the sky and the dweller within. Underscoring this concept, we find the following ruling in the Mishnah, which states (*Sukkah 1:2*):

סְכָה עַל גֶּבֶי סְכָה, הַעֲלִזָּה בָּשָׂרָה, וְהַפְּחַתָּה פְּטוֹלָה.

“If one *sukkah* is placed atop another *sukkah*, only the upper story is qualified for usage; the bottom story is disqualified.”

Recall that while residing in the desert, B'nei Yisrael were afforded special Divine protection in the form of *Ananei Kavod*, sacred Clouds of Glory. It is to this arrangement that the Torah refers when it states: *לְמַעַן יִדְעُ ذְּרַתֵּיכֶם כִּי בְּשֻׁכּוֹת הַזָּבְתִּי אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהַזָּמִינָה אֲזַרְעָל מִצְרָיִם* – “So that your generations shall know that I placed B'nei Yisrael within ‘*sukkos*’ when I took them out of the land of Egypt...” (*Vayikra 23:43; Rashi*). What emerges, then, is that there already was a covering intervening between Yisrael and the open sky. Thus, even had they fashioned *sukkos* and sat within them, they would not have been able to fulfill the mitzvah. Such *sukkos*, for all intents and purposes, would be designated as “*sukkah tachas ha'sukkah* – one *sukkah* underneath another,” which, as the Mishnah taught, is unsuited for usage (*Tzitz Eliezer VII § 31*).

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