

A Harvest of Sukkot Shorts for the 1st Day of Sukkot
Rabbi Eliot Malomet Tuesday September 21, 2021 15 Tishri 5782

תהילים צ"ז:י"א אור זרע לצדיק ולישרי לב שמחה:

Psalms 97:11

*Light is sown for the righteous,
radiance for the upright.*

Footnote on Kol Nidre. Did you ever wonder why this verse is recited prior to Kol Nidre? There is a tradition that associates this verse with Rabbi Akiva. Note the last letters of each of the words. ר' ע' ק' י' ב' ה' We won't quibble about whether his name ends in with an א or a ה. There is a tradition that R. Akiva died on Erev Yom Kippur. In Jewish spirituality he represents total devotion to God. אור-light is the first thing created, and there is an old tradition that the light of the first day is reserved for the righteous, hence, we aspire to that light through תשובה-return. But perhaps, when we start Yom Kippur we are also glancing ahead at Sukkot. After all, only once we have become *upright* (literally, *straightened our hearts*) can we achieve the joy reserved for us on Sukkot.

ויקרא כ"ג:ל"ד דבר אל־בני ישראל לאמר בהמשה עשר יום לחודש השביעי הזה תג הסכות שבועת ימים לה:

Leviticus 23:34 *Say to the Israelite people:*

On the fifteenth day of this seventh month there shall be the Feast of Sukkot to the LORD, [to last] seven days. The Torah here sets the calendrical terms for the holiday, but nothing is defined here. What constitutes a *sukkah*? If you have an ordinary harvest hut in your field that meets the physical requirements of a *sukkah* can you use it to fulfill your religious obligations of the holiday, or do you have to build a specific holiday-designated *sukkah*? Beit Hillel says that you can use an ordinary year-round hut. According to Beit Shammai though, because this verse says:

סכה ושנה, בית שמאי פוסליו, says, you have to have a specific hut for the holiday Intentionality vs. utility? Specificity vs. appropriation? The halakha follows Beit Hillel, but we give a nod to Beit Shammai by requiring that if you use an ordinary pre-built hut, it have some minimal novel feature, eg. a decoration or a piece of *schach* for the holiday.

תפילת מעריב ופרוש עלינו ספת שלומך

Ma'ariv Service: *Spread over us your Sukkah of Peace.* In Western culture peace is symbolized by

the dove. Why? In a word: Christianity. In Judaism, the Sukkah is the primary symbol of peace. Why? The Sukkah is shelter. Peace is associated with shelter from the hot sun. The Sukkah is a symbol of God's presence, the shade is reminiscent of God's protection, the *clouds of glory* that hovered over the Israelites as they traversed the desert. Like peace, the Sukkah derives its stability not from the things that it is made of, but from the spiritual quality of the space it encapsulates. Finally, the Sukkah is a reminder of the Temple, which was the place above all places associated with peace.

ויקרא כ"ג:מ"ב בסכת תשבון שבועת ימים פלהאזרח בישראל ישבון בסכת:

Leviticus 23:42 *You shall live in sukkot seven days; all citizens in Israel shall live in sukkot.*

One should "live" in the sukkah exactly as one lives at home, in other words, the sukkah is to become the prime dwelling place. How is this done? By eating all meals in the sukkah, by gathering there with friends and family, by studying Torah in it, and if the opportunity for prayer arises, by praying there as well. And even by sleeping in it!

ספרא יז:יא

למען ידעו דורותיכם פי בסוכות הושבתי את בני ישראל בהוציא אותם מארץ מצרים - רבי אליעזר אומר: סוכות קמש היו. רבי עקיבא אומר: בסוכות - ענני כבוד היו.

In order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in sukkot (Lev 23:43.R. Eliezer says: "They were real sukkot." R Akiba says: "They were the clouds of glory."

(Sifra 17:11, ed. I. Weiss, 103a-b) In the Babylonian Talmud (*Sukkot* 11b)—according to the printed edition and all known manuscripts—the names are reversed. This appears to be a debate about the essence of the commemoration. By dwelling in Sukkot are we *re-enacting* the desert experience by *re-creating* the actual dwellings of the Israelites or are we *commemorating* the experience of being in God's shelter/shade by *symbolizing* it in what would have been a familiar type of structure whose primary feature is shade? According to Jeff Rubenstein, R. Akiva is providing another *plain* sense of the text. *Sukkot* are never mentioned as

the structures in which Israel lived in the desert. On the contrary, they dwell in tents. *Mah tovu* anyone? (Num. 24:5) And here: *the people would rise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent* (Exod. 33:8). The *mishkan* is defined by the *Tent of Meeting* not the *Sukkah of Meeting*. Hosea: *I the Lord have been Your God ever since the land of Egypt. I will let you dwell in your tents again as in the days of old.* (Hos. 12:10). Nowhere else do we have a reference to Israel dwelling in *sukkot*, so what does the text mean? Rubenstein: *R. Akiva concluded that it made better sense to understand the term as “clouds (of God’s glory)” then as “(real) booths,” since the Torah does record the Israelites being surrounded by clouds but never mentions booths anywhere in the story.*

From the Haftara of the 1st Day

זכריה י"ד:ט' וְהָיָה ה' לְמֶלֶךְ עַל־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יְהִי ה' אֶחָד וְשִׁמּוֹ אֶחָד:

Zechariah 14:9 *And the LORD shall be king over all the earth; in that day there shall be one LORD with one name.* All three daily services end by quoting this verse in the *Aleinu*. Prayer, an intensely personal act, places the worshiper within the context of self, community, people, and the world. In the morning, a person begins with *modeh ani* – *I thank You* and ends with the vision of universal peace, that God will be One in the entire world. Jewish worship takes the worshiper from self to universe; from *what is* to *what ought to be*.

זכריה י"ד:ט"ז וְהָיָה כָּל־הַגּוֹתִר מִכָּל־הַגּוֹלִים הַבָּאִים עַל־יְרוּשָׁלַם וְעָלוּ מִדֵּי שָׁנָה בְּשָׁנָה לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לְמֶלֶךְ ה' צְבָאוֹת וְלִהְיוֹת אֶת־תִּגַּי הַסִּבּוֹת:

Zechariah 14:16 *All who survive of all those nations that came up against Jerusalem shall make a pilgrimage year by year to bow low to the King LORD of Hosts and to observe the Feast of Booths.* Passover is the holiday of the particular; Sukkot is the holiday of the universal. On Passover, only those who are linked to the people of Israel can partake of the Passover sacrifice. On Sukkot, 70 bulls are sacrificed to symbolize all the nations of the world. On Passover we tell the story of our founding; on Sukkot we celebrate our place within the world. On Passover the story is first and foremost, personal, familial, and designed to shape identity. On Sukkot, celebration and feasting and the vision of a world at peace, supersedes national storytelling. Song, praise, thanksgiving shapes the spiritual character.

Today we have inverted this: Passover has been “universalized” and has become almost about everything else but the liberation of our ancestors from Egypt; and Sukkot has been “particularized” celebrated mostly within the context of the observant Jewish religious community.

Some Verses from Hallel

תהילים קט"ו:ט'-י"ג
 יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּטַח בַּה' עֲזָרָם וּמִגֹּנָם הוּא: בֵּית אֱהָרֹן בְּטַח בַּה'
 עֲזָרָם וּמִגֹּנָם הוּא: יִרְאִי ה' בְּטַח בַּה' עֲזָרָם וּמִגֹּנָם הוּא: ה'
 זְכַרְנוּ יִבְרָךְ יִבְרָךְ אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל יִבְרָךְ אֶת־בֵּית אֱהָרֹן:
 יִבְרָךְ יִרְאִי ה' הַקְטָנִים עִם־הַגְּדֹלִים:

Psalms 115:9-13 *O Israel, trust in the LORD!*

He is their help and shield. O House of Aaron, trust in the LORD! He is their help and shield. O You Who Fear the LORD, trust in the LORD! He is their help and shield. The LORD is mindful of us. He will bless us; He will bless the House of Israel; He will bless the House of Aaron; He will bless those Who fear the LORD, small and great alike. Comment: We love to sing these lines in the Hallel. They present three categories of people: **The House of Aaron** refers to the people who are entrusted with the running of the Temple; **The House of Israel** refers to everyone assembled. **Those Who Fear the Lord** – *Rashi*: these are proselytes; *Metzudat David*: these are the Righteous of the World; *Radak*: these are scholars. Another interpretation: Poetically, the phrase **Those Who Fear the Lord** is parallel to **House of Israel** and **House of Aaron**. Everyone assembled in the Temple on the Festival is in that category, *House of Aaron* and *House of Israel* alike. The phrase *equalizes* and *democratizes* the religious experience, introducing a creative tension between leadership and those assembled. Thus the culminating phrase **הַקְטָנִים עִם־הַגְּדֹלִים** – **small and great alike** further emphasizes that *fearing God* is not the purview of the elite, but available to everyone, including children, including those of small stature.

A Line of Hoshanot

כְּהוֹשַׁעְתָּ אֱלֹהִים בְּלוֹד עַמְּךָ. בְּצִאֲתָךְ לִישַׁע עַמְּךָ. כִּן הוֹשַׁע נָא:
As you saved the great ones from Lud with You, when You went out to save Your people, So too please save! Hoshanot are among the most difficult prayers to understand in Judaism. They go back to the early Geonic period. Who is **Lud**? **Ludim** were born to Egypt (Gen. 10:13) but **Lud** is also a brother to Aram (Gen. 10:23). God brought us out of Egypt, but also out of Aram. Deliverance from both Egypt and Aram? Possibly... **Hag Sameah!** הַג שְׂמַח!