



Community Kollel Divrei Torah

July 11, 2021 - September 1, 2021

ב' אב - כ"ד אלול תשפ"א

*With gratitude to Hashem, our rabbis, teachers, and fellow Kollel participants,
we have completed Meschet Sukka, and engaged in Torah study during Av and Elul.*

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הִדְרוּ עֲלֵיךְ מִסֻּכַּת סוּכָה וְהִדְרוּ עָלָי, דַּעְתּוֹ עֲלֵיךְ מִסֻּכַּת סוּכָה וְדַעְתְּךָ עָלָי. לֹא נִתְנָשִׂי מִיָּנְךָ
מִסֻּכַּת סוּכָה וְלֹא תִתְנָשִׂי מִיָּנֵי, לֹא בְּעֹלְמָא הַדִּין וְלֹא בְּעֹלְמָא דְאַתֵּי

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*We will return to you, Tractate Sukka, and you will return to us; our mind is on you,
Tractate Sukka, and your mind is on us; we will not forget you, Tractate Sukka, and
you will not forget us - not in this world and not in the next world.*

Children Benefit From a Mother Learning Daf Yomi

Sukkah, 2b discusses: Is a sukkah that is 20 *amos* valid? The text states:

אמר רבי יהודה: מעשה בהילגני המלכה בלוד שהיתה סוכתה גבוהה מעשרים אמה, והיו זקנים נכנסין ויוצאין לשם ולא
אמרו לה דבר

The Daf recounts Queen Helena who had a sukkah which was 20 *amos*. The *zekanim* (elders) entered and exited her sukkah and they did not say anything to her [about it being not valid]. This episode confirmed R' Yehuda's opinion that a sukkah greater than 20 *amos* is valid. How so? The commentaries note that she was teaching her sons *chinuch* (education) and showing them how to properly fulfill the mitzvah of sukkah such that when they become obligated in the mitzvah of sukkah they will have learned the proper way to do the mitzvah. Rashi as translated by Artscroll notes that the rabbis required parents to train their minor children in the performance of mitzvot so that the children become accustomed to and proficient in their practice.

Where else do we learn about *chinuch*?

During Chanukah, we celebrate the physical victory of the Maccabees and the miracle of the oil lasting for eight days. We also celebrate the spiritual victory of *chinuch*. *Chinuch* was previously banned and now children were allowed to be educated about mitzvot again. The words “הנוכה – *chanukah*” and “חינוך - *chinuch*” have the same *shoresh* (root) “ח-נ-כ – *chet-nun-chaf*.” Women are *chayav* (obligated) in lighting the *chanukiah* because they were part of the miracle and the spiritual victory. When a mother lights the *chanukiah* on Chanukah and her children see her perform this mitzvah, they are in fact getting *chinuch*.

The *Shema* recited twice daily in accordance with *Sefer HaChinuch* (Mitzvah 420) is followed by the *V'ahavta* prayer which states, “*v'shinnantam l'vanecha* - teach your children.” (Devarim 6:7) Let's take a closer look at the word *v'shinnantam* which has the same *shoresh* ש-נ-נ as the word *l'shanen* meaning to sharpen. (Note the similar word *shinaim*, teeth, which are also sharp.) What are we sharpening? Kiddushin, 30a explains:

תנו רבנן ושננתם שיהו דברי תורה מחודדים בפיוך שאם ישאל לך אדם דבר אל תגמגם ותאמר לו אלא אמור לו מיד

The Sages taught: The verse states: “And you shall teach them diligently [v'shinnantam]” (Devarim 6:7). The root “ש-נ-נ - shin-nun-nun”, of v'shinnantam should be understood as meaning sharp, i.e., that matters of Torah should be sharp and clear in your mouth, so that if a person asks you something, do not stutter in uncertainty and say an uncertain response to him. Rather, answer him immediately.

The words of the Torah should be reviewed and grasped such that you express them sharply and with certainty. Even if women are *patur* (exempt) from *kriyat shema* because it is a positive time bound mitzvah, first recognize that a mother sharpens a child's knowledge. Second, recognize that there is no set time for sharpening knowledge - learning is a timeless pursuit. This is the essence of a mother's nurturing. It is because a mother is busy nurturing her children that she is *patur* from positive time bound mitzvot. It is difficult to distinguish between nurturing and *chinuch*. Both occur simultaneously and are timeless.

From Queen Helena to women participating in the victory which led to Chanukah, *chinuch* is often attributed to the mother and the role a mother has in *chinuch*. These stories are found in Daf Yomi. Children benefit from hearing these stories.

Hakarat hatov to my parents for giving me the timeless and eternal gift of chinuch.

-Jacqueline

The Pitchfork and the Sukka

Mesechta Sukka Daf 13 and Daf 14 spend time talking about the nature and materials of a *sukka*. When the discussion turns to the *shkach*, or roof materials, of a *sukka* the conversation becomes interesting. The text turns to what makes a “handle” of a vessel ritually impure and we begin to compare pitchforks to prayers.

Sukka 13b-14a states: “Didn’t we learn in a *mishna*: All vessels descend into their state of ritual impurity by means of thought? Although an unfinished vessel ordinarily cannot become ritually impure, if the craftsman decided to leave it in its unfinished state, it immediately assumes the legal status of a completed vessel and can become ritually impure. However, they ascend from their state of ritual impurity only by means of a change resulting from an action. Merely deciding to complete the unfinished vessel does not alter its status. It loses its status as a vessel only when he takes action to complete it. Action negates status created by action and status created by thought; however, thought negates neither status created by action nor status created by thought. Therefore, once the straw of the grain harvested for food is considered a handle and is susceptible to ritual impurity, its status cannot be negated by thought alone.”

Enter the pitchfork.

Sukka 14a states: “Apropos a pitchfork, the Gemara cites a related *aggadic* teaching: Rabbi Elazar said: Why are the prayers of the righteous likened to a pitchfork [*eter*]? It is written: “And Isaac entreated [*vayetar*] the Lord for his wife, because she was barren” (Genesis 25:21), to say to you: Just as this pitchfork overturns the grain on the threshing floor from place to place, so too, the prayers of the righteous overturn the mind of the Holy One, Blessed be He, from the attribute of cruelty to the attribute of mercy, and He accepts their prayers.:

The mitzvah *Sukka* and holiday of *Tisha B’Av* have been on my mind for three weeks. *Sukka* is a ritual I embrace, relate to, and look forward to every year. *Tisha B’Av* is another story. Why do we mourn for a building and rituals we lost so many years ago? What does it have to do with myself, my family and my community? Like the pitchfork, our minds can be used to benefit and further our purpose, or we hold ourselves neutral or even worse, dangerous. We can negate our status of ritual purity by inaction, or we can be like the pitchfork, take action, and use ourselves to “overturn” our status with the actions of Torah study, service/prayer, and acts for loving kindness – *Al haTorah, v’al Avodah, V’al Gemilut Hasadim*. Like the pitchfork we are useless without the power of another force. The pitchfork needs human power to come out of its inert state, and we need *HaShem* to move us forward. But how do we summon the connection to *HaShem* that enables us to move forward?

Ufros Aleinu Sukkat Shelomecha. Spread over us Your *sukkat* of peace. We say this in the *Hashkiveinu* prayer every evening. *HaShem* is asked to comfort and protect us. Every year I look forward to embodying this prayer by building, eating in, and doing the mitzvah of the Lulav and Etrog in the sukkah. *It is personal and communal, and my eyes can see the ritual objects*. *Tisha B'Av* is somber, and without insight into what the practice of observing this time of year calls us to do, it can seem too formidable. This year my husband and I took the action of looking into this memorial day. We read Erica Brown's introduction to her book, "When Memory Speaks," [Erica Brown](#), we listened to Rabbi Meir Soloveichik speak about memory and mourning [The Miracle of Jewish Memory](#), and we read *Eicha*. A miracle occurred. Our internal pitchforks turned over our understanding and we began to think that *Tisha B'Av* might be the Jewish date that we could relate to better than any others – personally, as a family, and in relation to our community. This fast day was about our identity as Jewish people, different from a day of atonement when we examine our own, individual doings.

Issac pleaded with *HaShem* to "turn over" the status of his home and bring about the birth of children. We pray the Amidah in three parts, praising Hashem, petitioning Hashem 18 or 19 times, and then thanking Hashem for the strength to bring good work to our lives. We can connect to our "inner pitchforks" by picking up the handles and moving forward. Thinking about doing an action is only the beginning. Digging in and shaking out the seeds might bring about the changes we want.

-Deborah Kopp

As I was contemplating the myriad of ways that I could write a *d'var Torah* on things I have studied this week, I found a line from a Matisyahu song, which gave me the direction I needed.

Sometimes I lay under the moon
And thank God I'm breathin'
Then I pray, "Don't take me soon
'Cause I am here for a reason."
Sometimes in my tears I drown
But I never let it get me down
So when negativity surrounds
I know some day it'll all turn around...
Matisyahu "One Day"

As we study Tractate Sukka, I have been fascinated with the details the sages obsess about regarding the what makes a sukkah kosher—the dimensions, the shape, the building materials, and the intention of materials used in its construction and also regarding the *schach*. If some certain materials, such as a mat, are to be used as *schach*, the intention is for them to have to be designated for the purpose of roofing, not for use first as a mat that would be used for sitting or sleeping (Sukka 20a). Posts used in the construction have to be able to stand on the ground, and not be supported by a bed, lest it become susceptible to ritual impurity or that it might collapse (Sukka 2b).

For several days, we studied what makes *schach* able to be used and how it should be placed on top of a Sukkah. According to the Star-K kashrut website, "How much *schach* should be used to cover the *sukkah*? The amount required is determined by the amount necessary to shade the *sukkah*. The *schach* must be dense enough so that there should not be more sunlight than shade. However, it cannot be so dense that the rain would not be able to fall into the *sukkah*." There is also a tradition that when in a *sukkah*, we should be able to see stars through the roof.

This made me begin to think of the *Hashkiveinu*:

Hashkiveinu adokai elokeinu l'shalom,
Lay us down to sleep, Lord our G-d, in peace,
v'ha'amideinu malkeinu l'chayim,
raise us erect, our King, to life;
ufros aleinu sukat sh'lomecha,
spread over us the shelter of Your peace.
v'tak'neinu b'eitzah tovah mil'fanecha,
Set us aright with good counsel from before Your Presence,
v'hoshieinu l'ma'an sh'mecha.
and save us for Your Name's sake.

V'hagein ba'adeinu, v'haseir mei'aleinu
 Shield us, remove from us
oyeiv, dever v'cherev v'ra'av v'yagon,
 foe, plague, sword, famine, and woe;
v'haseir satan mil'faneinu umei'achareinu,
 and remove spiritual impediment from before us and behind us
uv'tzeil k'nafecha tastireinu,
 and shelter us in the shadow of Your wings –
ki kel shom'reinu umatzileinu atah,
 for G-d who protects and rescues us are You;
ki kel melech chanun v'rachum atah
 for G-d, the Gracious and Compassionate King, are You.
Us'hmor tzeiteinu uvoeinu, l'chayim ul'shalom mei'atah v'ad olam.
 Safeguard our going and coming – for life and for peace from now to eternity.
Baruch atah Adokai, shomeir amo yisraeil l'ad.
 Blessed are You, Lord, Guardian of Israel for always.

A year and a half ago, because the world as I knew it had been shut down, I was in a dark place, as were most people I know. We weren't able to spend time visiting with friends and family, jobs had all been forever changed, and everyone struggled to find some sort of normalcy in the unsteady world. As I studied Torah more and more, I found peace, hope, and light. We still live in tumultuous times. Violent crimes are happening every day, with mass shootings sadly becoming commonplace, Covid is on the rise again, and vaccinated people are getting sick. The US is polarized in every possible way, however, when I think about Sukkot, which is my favorite holiday, I am grateful that we have been given these guidelines in order to have peace and stability. We need to remember that the *sukkah* is our *shalom* and that we must spread that *shalom* throughout the world. During the holiday, we welcome guests or strangers into our *sukkah*. The intentionality of our actions is what will bring peace by spreading a tiny bit of light into a dark world.

It brings me hope to know that I can dwell in *sukkat shalom* and while things might look dim now, the light that shines in through the *schach* can make a big impact. As Matisyahu says, "I am here for a reason" and I know that the more I study Torah that I am intentionally going to be a small beam of light sharing Torah with the world and I encourage everyone else to do the same, so that we can spread *shalom*.

-Aharon Zamir (Monty) Bennett

Measuring Heaven and Earth

The Talmud is replete with discussions about quantities and measurements of all manner of items relevant to what constitutes *halachic* observance. One quickly notices that measures are often relative to objects and mathematical calculations available to the Sages, as compared to objective “scientific standards”. Notwithstanding the rudimentary tools of science available in the Talmudic era, there are strenuous attempts by the Rabbis to be as accurate and precise as possible – and at other times there seem to be values governing measures with little or no connection to mathematical principles. I will attempt to analyze 3 sugyas we studied in Daf Yomi, to derive an underlying theme differentiating cases of accuracy, precision, or some other driving principle behind the measurements.

First, we encounter the following sugya, discussing how we know that the minimum height of a Sukka needs to be 10 handbreadths. After arcane derivations ranging from the dimensions of the Tabernacle and its vessels, to the size of the face of the Bar Yokhani bird, an eye-opening statement is made by Rabbi Yehuda as to the origin of the 10-handbreadth measure:

[סוכה ה' ב:י"ג](#)

אָלָא, לְרַבִּי יְהוּדָה הִלְכָתָא גְמִירִי לֵהּ. דְּאָמַר רַבִּי חֲזִיָּא בַּר אֲשִׁי אָמַר רַב: שִׁיעוּרֵינוּ, חֲצִיצִיּוֹן, וּמְחִיצִיּוֹן — הִלְכָה לְמִשְׁפָּה מִסִּינַי

[Sukkah 5b:13](#)

Rather, according to **Rabbi Yehuda**, the Sages **learned** the minimum height of a *sukka* as a *halakha* transmitted to Moses from Sinai. **As Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Ashi said that Rav said: The measures** in various areas of *halakha*, e.g., olive-bulk, dried fig-bulk, egg-bulk, **and** the various *halakhot* of **interpositions** that serve as a barrier between one’s body and the water in a ritual bath and invalidate immersions, **and** the dimensions and nature of halakhic **partitions** are all *halakhot* transmitted to **Moses from Sinai**. They were not written in the Torah; rather, they were received in the framework of the Oral Law.

Essentially Rabbi Yehuda is conceding we don’t know the basis for the measurement of the minimum qualifying height of a *sukka*, rather we attribute it to Oral Law transmission directly to Moshe from Hashem at Mt. Sinai. The Rabbis rebut Rabbi Yehuda, with examples of how, to the contrary, various other measurements (for example the time required to become ritually impure when entering a leprose house) are absolutely and explicitly learned from Biblical sources.

So we are left with opposing views as to the origins of the 10-handbreadth measure, and a lack of clarity as to who exactly is responsible for determining the measures.

In a second example there is the following discussion of the minimum qualifying size of a round *sukka*:

אמר רבי יוחנן: סוכה העשויה ככפון, אם יש בהקיפה כדי לישב בה עשרים וארבעה בני אדם — כשרה, ואם לאו — פסולה

[Sukkah 7b:19](#)

Rabbi Yohanan said: With regard to a *sukka* that is **shaped like a furnace** and is completely round, **if its circumference has sufficient space for twenty-four people to sit in it, it is fit, and if not, it is unfit.**

The Gemara goes on to analyze this position of Rabbi Yohanan, specifically how he arrived at the size to accommodate 24 people. Mathematically, assuming a person occupies 1 cubit, the more precise calculation – considering Rabbi Yohanan follows Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi whose minimum size of Sukka is 4x4 cubits – should be a circumference of 12 cubits (=12 people), since the Rabbis calculate Pi to be 3, and clearly understood the ratio between diameter and circumference. Rabbi Yohanan seems to require double the necessary circumference, which is neither accurate nor precise, by a large margin, even by the contemporary mathematical skills of his time.

The Rabbis grapple with such a large error in Rabbi Yohanan’s calculation, and attempt to explain his inaccuracy by proposing various geometric models of inscribed and circumscribed squares and circles to account for the number 24, and conclude that the error is simply too large to ascribe to mere approximation or rounding. They simply do not understand his rationale. The best defense mounted is to say that Rabbi Yohanan appropriately erred on the side of stringency, i.e. his larger minimum size of 24, albeit double the minimum, would at least not cause an invalid Sukka.

Again, we are left with an unsatisfactory understanding of the relative importance of numerical accuracy and precision in *halachic* measures, and who gets to decide them.

The last example, begins to shed light on a possible theme explaining the variance in numeric accuracy and precision and decision empowerment that we see from sugyas like those above.

From Gemara Bava Batra 23b:

בְּעֵי רַבִּי יִרְמְיָה רִגְלוֹ אַחַת בְּתוֹךְ הַמְּשִׁים אַמָּה וְרִגְלוֹ אַחַת חוּץ מִן־הַמְּשִׁים אַמָּה מֵהוּ וְעַל דָּא אִפְקוּהוּ לְרַבִּי יִרְמְיָה מִבֵּי מְדַרְשָׁא

Rabbi Yirmeya raises a dilemma: If one leg of the chick was within fifty cubits of the dovecote, and one leg was beyond fifty cubits, what is the halakha? The Gemara comments: And it was for his question about this far-fetched scenario that they removed Rabbi Yirmeya from the study hall, as he was apparently wasting the Sages’ time.

This sugya is often cited humorously, but I believe there is a profound underlying message to the seemingly frivolous question Rabbi Yirmeya asks, viz. “What is the ultimate purpose of measures”? Of course, at face value, we can easily appreciate that without delineating go/no-go conditions (i.e. measurements of pass/fail), we would not know how to conduct our actions in fulfillment of the commandments. Quantities and measurements are the currency of *Halacha*, without which we would not know how to act in this world we inhabit.

But digging deeper, who is empowered to decide what the basis of measurements are? Do the numbers descend from Heaven as it were (הִלָּכָה לְמִשְׁפַּחַת מִסִּינַי), or are they entrusted to humans to come up with a rationale and means of measuring (like Rabbi Yohanan deciding that 24 people in a circle is the minimum size of a circular sukka)?

While at surface level Rabbi Yirmeya’s question could certainly be seen to be a frivolous mockery of the Sages because he posed an absurd hairsplitting scenario that seemingly didn’t add any practical learning to the rulings already taught in the case in question (see the discussion in the Gemara text prior to his question), therefore requiring his ejection from the beit midrash, I believe he was in effect exposing a fine balancing point in *Halacha* that demanded a harsh response from the Rabbis. The fundamental power balance of *Halacha* I refer to, is intriguingly hinted at, just before the first sugya discussed above, in the lead up to the discussion of the source for a sukka needing to be 10 cubits tall.

From Sukka 5a:

וּמִנְיָא, רַבִּי יוֹסֵי אוֹמֵר: מֵעוֹלָם לֹא יֵרְדֶה שְׂכִינָה לְמַטֵּה, וְלֹא עָלוּ מִשְׁפַּחַת מִסִּינַי לְמַרְוֹם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: “הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁמַיִם לַיהוָה וְהָאָרֶץ נְתַן לְבְנֵי אָדָם”

and it is taught in a *baraita* that Rabbi Yosei says: The Divine Presence never actually descended below, and Moses and Elijah never actually ascended to heaven on high, as it is stated: “The heavens are the heavens of the Lord, and the earth He gave to the children of man” (Psalms 115:16), indicating that these are two distinct domains. Apparently, from ten handbreadths upward is considered a separate domain. Consequently, any *sukka* that is not at least ten handbreadths high is not considered an independent domain and is unfit.

So from this source, specifically Psalms 115:16, we see the famous dictum “הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁמַיִם לַיהוָה וְהָאָרֶץ נְתַן לְבְנֵי אָדָם”, which is the ultimate empowerment of mankind in all earthy matters, giving us permission to construct the regulations and measures of our lives according to our God given abilities – but by the same token, an admonition, that we humans cannot and must not ever rise above the 10 handbreadths defining the separation of Heaven and Earth.

Now we can better understand what so offended the Rabbis in Rabbi Yirmeya's question: he was challenging them precisely at the seamline of Heaven and Earth, a line that we cannot ever cross. It wasn't the absurdity or unreality of his question per se that was the problem (there are many much more absurd hypothetical questions asked by various Sages, for example building a sukka on the back of a camel or using an elephant as a wall of a sukka), but what distinguished his question is that the Rabbis had already answered the 2 dominant most plausible scenarios of the chick being on one side or the other of the 50 cubits line, using sound rationale and measurements, hence there was no practical ramification to his question that could plausibly aid better adherence to *Halacha*. The Rabbis had already used the empowerment Hashem granted to mankind to good effect, to derive meaningful measures that inform actions, fulfilling the "separation of duties" and respecting the differences of the realms of God and mankind.

What Rabbi Yirmeya was effectively doing, was challenging the very legitimacy of this fine line of separation between God and mankind by posing a deliberately provocative "klutz-question" beyond the "10 handbreadths" of rational human empowerment defining the realm of mankind. It wasn't the accuracy (50 cubits) or the precision (1 chick leg to the left of the line, the other chick leg to the right of that line) that constituted his challenge, it was the fundamental lack of appreciation of the distinct but limited empowerment of mankind to operate only in the earthly realm by human rationale (which the Rabbis has adequately fulfilled), as distinct and impenetrable to the realm of Hashem, that he was threatening, and hence deserved censure.

Where is the 10-cubit line for each of us, between Heaven and Earth? Is it an objective universal measure (i.e. an external immutable reality), or personal and context dependent, relative and intrinsic to who we are individually? In the example of Rabbi Yirmeya, did it make a difference that it was him asking the question, or would anyone challenging authority in the way he did, be thrown out the beit midrash? Questioning brightly drawn lines, even with far-fetched scenarios, is evidently acceptable provided the questioner and their motivation is deemed *l'sheim shamayim* by the Rabbis of authority.

Like in the famous case of the 4 children at the Pesach seder, the wise and the evil ask the same question. But one is praised, and the other is severely censured. In the eyes of the Rabbis only one of the children chose and lived well, in the elusive and immeasurable zone between Heaven and Earth.

-Steve Sacho

R'Yehuda HaNasi says: Do not read the verse as written, "hadar," meaning beautiful, but rather read it, "hadir," meaning the sheep pen. And it means, just as in this pen there are large and small sheep, unblemished and blemished sheep, so too, this tree has large and small fruits, flawless and blemished fruits. (Sukkah 35a:4)

One of my favorite parts of studying Talmud is that quite often, I'll come across a passage that makes me do a double take. I had to read the comparison of an etrog tree to a sheep pen several times, and I ended up with more questions than answers.

Why, of all things, is the etrog tree compared to a sheep pen? Rabbi Yehuda's reasoning is that they both have large and small contents, blemished and unblemished. By these parameters, there are infinite comparisons one could make to an etrog tree. Almost any group of items could count. A basket of blueberries, a clothes closet, a silverware drawer.

But taking it a bit further, I think the Gemara is making an interesting point. There are a few more similarities that apply to an etrog tree and a sheep pen. Both are living things and both are tended to by humans. Both of them require specific and careful maintenance in order to grow healthily. Both create products of some sort, one of them being wool and meat and the other being etrogim for sukkot. Both are containers which hold a collection of items that grow physically and spiritually inside them.

The Gemara wonders: Is that to say that among other fruits there are not large and small fruits, flawless and blemished fruits? How does this description identify the etrog specifically? Rather, this is what R'Yehuda HaNasi is saying: Just as in a pen, there are both large and small sheep together, so too, on an etrog tree, when the small ones come into being, the large ones still exist on the tree, which is not the case with other fruit trees.

So we see that the most important similarity is that within the pen, and on the tree, there is a variety of products that are able to thrive alongside each other. And so too, in any community, we have many people with many differences who create something beautiful through cooperation and coexistence. A community is a home for life and is tended by humans with the product being cooperation and love. It takes hard work and dedication to maintain. What it creates is spiritual connection and growth.

-Aryeh Leib Reynolds

Four Species and People

We are taught in a midrash: "The fruit of a beautiful tree" - these are [referring to] Israel. Just like this citron (etrog), which has taste and has smell, so too Israel has among them people that have Torah and have good deeds. "The branches of a date palm" - these are [referring to] Israel. Just like this date, which has taste and has no smell, so too Israel has among them those that have Torah but do not have good deeds. "And a branch of a braided tree (a myrtle)" - these are [referring to] Israel. Just like this myrtle, which has smell and has no taste, so too Israel has among them those that have good deeds but do not have Torah. "And brook willows" - these are [referring to] Israel. Just like this willow, which has no smell and has no taste, so too Israel has among them people that have no Torah and have no good deeds. And what does the Holy One, blessed be He, do to them? To destroy them is impossible, but rather the Holy One, blessed be He, said "bind them all together [into] one grouping and these will atone for those." (Vayikra Raba 30:12)

The Mishna on Sukkah 29b rules that a "lulav...that is completely dry is unfit." The Mishna on 32b rules "that a myrtle branch...that is completely dry is unfit." The "willow that is completely dry is unfit." (m. Sukka 33b) Finally, the Mishnah on 34b rules similarly for an etrog.

The myrtle and willow of our *lulavim* bundles seem to dry up the most quickly: We are told to keep them in the refrigerator, and or sprinkle them with water periodically on *Hol HaMoed*. They also are apparently the most fragile, even though the etrog pitom is exposed, too. The lulav (palm) itself seems to take a bit of work to dry, even in our hot-ish climate. And the etrog itself seems to take quite a while.

The midrash in Vayikra Raba 30 appears to be telling us, in part, that the myrtle and willow represent people of Israel that lack in "Torah" or are lacking both good deeds and "Torah". They "dry out" quickly with this lack of "life-force", and – from the Mishna – render the entire bunch unfit for the holiday. The midrash seems to respond that it's our duty if we have both "Torah" and good deeds, to strengthen our bonds as Jews by ensuring that even those of us without a constant stream of good deeds or Torah are worthy of our nationhood. We must ensure that our Torah and good deeds are also conveyed with *Derekh Eretz*, maybe even in smaller bunches, and in full recognition that they have worth and are a part of our band. Torah is often compared to water, and the traditional Psalms for the seven days of Sukkot are 42 and 43, that begin "As the hind pants after the stream, so does my soul for the Lord".

-Daniel Alhadeff

I have been thinking all morning about the distinction between Tzedakah (charity) and Chesed (kindness), which appears in Sukkah 49b. There are many obvious, almost trivial, expansions on the gemarah. Kindness is available to all no matter their means; we can offer kindness but not charity to animals; we speak of good deeds within a family as kindness but not charity.

Perhaps a more important difference is that Tzedakah—much like teshuvah and tefillah—is a human activity. We pray to H'Shem for Chesed and Rachamim, but we don't pray for H'Shem to give us Tzedakah. If goodness and fortune come our way even when we are destitute, we attribute it to H'Shem's kindness and mercy, not His charity. Kindness and mercy are G-d-like.

In contrast, teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah are human, not really activities of H'Shem. Maimonides even placed in a hierarchy different categories of tzedakah, (depending on anonymity, etc.) a rating system that can only be applied to human endeavor and not to the works of H'Shem.

While these human activities are bounded, they are important. They are aspirational of an all-too human and flawed person trying to be better, trying to improve. In Elul and the Chaggim, we are not encouraged to engage in Chesed and Rachamim but rather in all too human teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah. It is to H'shem that we pray for Chesed and Rachamim.

Tzedakah and Chesed are both important. While Chesed is perhaps loftier and more universal than tzedakah, we need both.

-Harold Furchtgott-Roth

I always find it amazing that a topic discussed in the Daf Yomi is from (or connected to) the weekly Parsha. The Lubavitcher Rebbe famously said that no matter when (in our history) we are reading the Parsha – there is a lesson that can and should be learned from that specific Torah Portion!

So, when we were studying Daf 47 in Mesechet Sukka earlier this week, the gemara was trying to discern that Rabbi Yehuda's opinion is that the 8th day of Sukkoth (known to us as Shmini Atzeret) is a holiday by its own merit. Rabbi Yehuda has an argument with the other sages about this, and one of the proofs that the gemara brings to question his opinion is from a *baraita* (an “external” mishna) that says that the verse: “and you shall turn in the morning and go unto your tents” (Deuteronomy 16:7) must mean that it is to exclude the 8th day?!

The gemara rejects this: No, it comes to exclude the second Pesach, which is similar to the first Pesach in terms of its offering, and it teaches that since it is not followed by the observance of six days there is no obligation to stay overnight.

The gemara says: So too, it is reasonable to say that Rabbi Yehuda is excluding the second Pesach, as we learned in a mishna: The first fruits require:

1. a peace offering to be brought with them,
2. a song unique to the occasion, sung by the Levites,
3. waving, and
4. staying overnight.

Whom did you hear who said that first fruits require waving? It is Rabbi Yehuda, and the mishna is saying that first fruits require staying overnight. Apparently, Rabbi Yehuda excludes only the second Pesach from the requirement of staying overnight. Rabbi Yehuda holds that first fruits require waving, as it was taught in a *baraita*: Rabbi Yehuda says that it is stated with regard to first fruits: “And you shall set it down before the Lord your God,” (Deuteronomy 26:10), and this is referring to waving before the altar the basket containing the first fruits. Do you say that this is referring to waving, or perhaps it is referring only to actually setting it down adjacent to the altar? When the Torah says: “And the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 26:4), setting it down is already stated. How, then, do I establish the meaning of the verse: “And you shall set it down”? This is referring to waving.

So, the proper procedure for bringing the first fruit (which is mentioned only in this week's Parsha, Ki Tavo) is as follows: the Israelite (farmer) brings the basket with the first fruit in it to the Priest in the Temple, with it, he brings also a *Shlamim* (peace offering); while the animal is being slaughtered and the blood sprinkled on the Altar – the Levites sing a special song, from *Tehillim* (Book of Psalms) and the priest waves the basket upwards, as if giving it to Hashem, and then he places it beside the altar, to be taken by him at the end of the day.

Just one cute idea that I was never aware of: the mishna in Mesechet Bikkurim says that the baskets were part of the gift to the kohen. Therefore, the mishna mentions that the richer the farmer was – the material of which the basket was made of was more expensive – even gold! The Sefardi Jews (to this day) have the custom on Purim to make the dish/basket of the *Shalach Manos* part of the gift, and are terribly insulted if you return it!

May we merit to fulfill the mitzvah of Bikkurim speedily in our days, Amen!

-Rabbi Yosef Goldman