

Good Shabbos and good Yom Tov, everyone.

I want to thank the drasha sponsors:

- Rick and Sarah Bernard; “In memory of her sister, Lee Ann Levinson, Leah bas Yaakov, whose yahrtzeit is the 14<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei.”
- Murray and Baila Jacobson; “In memory of his Grandmother, Sarah Leah Yankelowitch, whose yahrtzeit is the 15<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei.”
- Mike and Layne Lowenstein; “In honor of our leadership triumvirate: Fleet Admiral Rabbi Binyamin Marwick - our spiritual guide, Admiral Kenny Friedman - our organizational leader, and Vice Admiral Itzi Barr - our financial advisor; for steering our ship in uncharted water during turbulent times.”
- David and Judy Marwick; “In memory of his father, Elazar ben Eliezer, whose yahrtzeit is the 20<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei.”

Thank you for your generosity and support of the shul. Wishing you and your families a פתקא טבא and a year filled with good health and happiness, bracha and hatzlacha!

When the Jewish people left *Mitzrayim*, *Hashem* housed them in symbolic *sukkos*, guided and covered by the *ananei hakavod*, the clouds of glory, which provided protection and direction. To commemorate this special protection, we are commanded to sit in *sukkos* for seven days. בסוכות תשבו שבעת ימים למען ידעו דורותיכם כי בסוכות הושבתי את בני ישראל בהוציא אותם מארץ מצרים, אני ה'.

The *pasuk* ends with the line “*Ani Hashem*,” “I am Hashem.” Why does *Hashem* sign His name, “*Ani Hashem*,” specifically with this *mitzva*?

Let us first deal with another, and obvious, question which many early commentators ask--why is the *Yom Tov* of *Sukkos* celebrated in the fall? Isn't this the **wrong** time of the year? If, historically, *Sukkos* commemorates the special protection afforded by God to the Jewish people when they left *Mitzrayim*, didn't this occur in the **spring**? Wouldn't it be more logical then to celebrate in the spring?

The 14<sup>th</sup> century commentator, the “**Tur**,” Rav Yaakov ben Asher, shares an interesting perspective on the timing of *Sukkos*. He tells us that this peculiarity is **precisely why** the Torah fixed *Sukkos* in the month of Tishrei, rather than in Nissan.

טור אורח חיים הלכות סוכה סימן תרכה  
ואף על פי שיצאנו ממצרים בחדש ניסן לא צונו לעשות סוכה באותו הזמן לפי שהוא ימות הקיץ ודרך כל אדם לעשות סוכה לצל ולא היתה ניכרת עשייתנו בהם שהם במצות הבורא יתברך ולכן צוה אותנו שנעשה בחדש השביעי שהוא זמן הגשמים ודרך כל אדם לצאת מסוכתו ולישב בביתו ואנחנו יוצאין מן הבית לישב בסוכה בזה יראה לכל שמצות המלך היא עלינו לעשותה

In Eretz Yisrael, Nissan, introduces the spring. It was customary in agricultural societies for people to build small booths in the open, which enabled them to enjoy the fresh air and provided shade from the sun. If the Torah had required us to observe *Sukkos* in the spring, it would not be absolutely clear that we were sitting in the huts to comply with God's commandment. Instead, it might look like the booths are primarily for our own enjoyment and relaxation, and we are performing a *mitzvah* only **incidentally**.

However, in this month of Tishrei, anticipating the weather turning cold and wet, people normally dismantled their summer booths, their private *sukkas*, and returned to their regular residences. Therefore, when we build our huts **now**, it is **absolutely clear** that we are building and sitting in them solely for the purpose of performing the *mitzva*.

And it makes sense that God would require this level of focus and concentration when it comes to the *mitzva* of *sukkos*, because the *Yom Tov* of *Sukkos* commemorates God's protection, care, and concern for us. Hashem is focused directly on us. And He expects that same concentration and consideration from us towards Him as well. In life, we sometimes take Hashem for granted, and we sometimes forget about His presence in our lives. I believe that is why the pasuk ends "Ani Hashem," as if to say—the function of this mitzva is to make sure you pay attention to His presence in your lives.

As I mentioned on *Kol Nidrei* night, *chazal* refer to sins in general, as *aveiros*, because the word *aveira* comes from the Hebrew root "*avar*," which means **to simply pass by—without even noticing**. When we commit an *aveira*, it means that we did not take the time to consider our actions, to put proper thought into the way we treat God and other people. It implies a level of carelessness, a level of indifference and disinterest, a lack of attention. It is not malicious or premeditated, but it is, in fact, very dangerous, because the *avaryan*, the indifferent person, to a large extent ignores God and his fellow man altogether. **He simply doesn't care enough to pay attention**. He does not consider it a priority to think before he acts, to analyze his actions and the way he treats others, or the care and consideration he shows to Hashem. He simply closes his eyes to God and others, and to his responsibilities, as he walks nonchalantly through the journey of life.

The **Ramchal** discusses this in Chapter 2 of *Mesilas Yesharim*, when discussing *zehirus*, translated as watchfulness, attention, and vigilance.

הנה ענין הזהירות הוא שיהיה האדם נזהר במעשיו ובעניניו, כלומר, מתבונן ומפקח על מעשיו ודרכיו, הטובים הם אם לא, לבלתי עזוב נפשו לסכנת האבדון חס וחלילה ולא ילך במהלך הרגלו כעור באפלה.

*The essence of zehirus is for one to be cautious of his actions and affairs, namely, contemplating and monitoring his actions and his ways in life, to determine whether they are good or evil; so that he not abandon his soul to the danger of destruction, G-d forbid, and not simply proceed through life following his routines and habits, like a blind man walking in the dark.*

וההולך בעולמו בלי התבוננות אם טובה דרכו או רעה, הנה הוא כסומא ההולך על שפת הנהר אשר סכנתו ודאי עצומה ורעתו קרובה מהצלתו. כי אולם חסרון השמירה מפני העורון הטבעי או מפני העורון הרצוני דהיינו סתימת העינים בבחירה וחפץ, אחד הוא.

*One who travels through his world without contemplating whether his ways are good or evil is similar to a blind man walking on the bank of a river. His danger is certainly very great and his misfortune is more likely than his salvation. For negligence in guarding oneself from danger due to natural blindness and negligence due to willful blindness, namely shutting one's eyes by choice and preference is one and the same.*

והנה ירמיהו היה מתאונן על רוע בני דורו מפני היותם נגועים בנגע המדה הזאת, שהיו מעלימים עיניהם ממעשיהם בלי שישימו לב לראות מה הם: הלהעשות אם להעזב?

*Yirmiyahu bemoaned the corruption of the people of his generation on account of their being afflicted with the plague of this trait. They would turn a blind eye to their deeds, without paying attention to consider what they were doing, whether to do or refrain from doing it.*

שהיו רודפים והולכים במרוצת הרגלם ודרכיהם מבלי שיניחו זמן לעצמם לדקדק על המעשים והדרכים, ונמצא שהם נופלים ברעה בלי ראות אותה.

*They raced along on the path of life, following the momentum of habit and routine, without leaving themselves time to consider their deeds and ways. Thus, they fell into evil without even seeing it.*

We are generally so consumed with our lives and mundane affairs, that, as Ramchal writes, we are "racing along following our habits and familiar paths." He was echoing the words of the Navi, Yirmiyahu, who accused his generation of being במלחמה

like a horse racing in war, implying that we do not spend even a few seconds considering God or our fellow man. Much of the time, we do not consider our ethical obligations, our religious duties, and our moral imperatives. We do not think before we act.

How sad and tragic it is that we just don't stop to think, we don't take the few moments to plan, and think, and contemplate our actions, and focus on *Hashem*.

As **Ramchal** continues:

שאלולי היו שמים לבם כמעט קט על דרכיהם, ודאי שמיד היו מתחילים להנחם ממעשיהם, והיתה החרטה הולכת ומתגברת בהם עד שהיו עוזבים החטא לגמרי.

*if they were to put their ways to heart even the slightest bit, certainly they would immediately begin to feel regret for their deeds. The remorse would go and intensify within them until they would abandon the sin completely.*

The *sukka* represents *zehirus*, attention and watchfulness. It reminds us of **Judaism's demand that we live our lives with care and attention, not incidentally**. *Mitzva* observance should cause us to think carefully about our actions because *mitzvah* observance requires focus and attention.

The *Halachic* system in its entirety reveals this principle, and—the **Shuchan Aruch** (60:4) affirms that *mitzvos tzrichos kavana*, *mitzvas* require attention. They cannot be done incidentally.

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים הלכות קריאת שמע סימן ס סעיף ד  
\* (ז) י"א שאין מצות צריכות כוונה, \* וי"א (ח) שצריכות כוונה \* (ט) לצאת בעשיית אותה מצוה, \* (י) ג [ב] וכן הלכה.

Performing an act that one is doing anyway, which also happens to be a *Mitzva*, does not fulfill a Divine commandment. For example, if someone happens to be eating *matza* and later finds out it was the first night of Pesach, he did not fulfill his obligation.

Usually, general intent to perform a *mitvza* is enough. But the *mitvza* of *Sukka*, which commemorates God's attention and care for the Jews as they left *Mitzrayim*, requires even more specific kavana. The **Bach** understands from the **Tur** that an awareness of **why** we are sitting in the *Sukka* is absolutely essential to perform this *Mitzva* properly. Indeed, the Torah stresses that awareness is the whole purpose of the *Mitzva*. למען ידעו דורותיכם כי בסוכות הושבתי את בני ישראל.

ב"ח אורח חיים סימן תרכה  
ויראה לי לומר בזה שסובר דכיון דכתיב למען ידעו וגו' לא קיים המצוה כתיקונה אם לא ידע כוונת מצות הסוכה כפי פשטה ולכן ביאר לפי הפשט דעיקר הכוונה בשיבת הסוכה שיזכור יציאת מצרים. . . וכן גבי סוכה שכתוב למען ידעו וגו' משמע ליה גם כן שצריך שיכוין בשעת ישיבת הסוכה הטעם המכוון במצוה:

This is the reason, according to the Amora **Rabba**, the *schach* must be within 20 *amos* of the ground--about 30 feet high--so we are constantly aware of its presence as we sit in the *succah*.

תלמוד בבלי סוכה דף ב' עמוד א'  
סוכה שהיא גבוה למעלה מעשרים אמה פסולה, מנה"מ, אמר רבה, דאמר קרא למען ידעו דורותיכם כי בסוכות הושבתי, עד עשרים אמה אדם יודע שהוא דר בסוכה, למעלה מעשרים אמה אין אדם יודע שהוא דר בסוכה, משום דלא שלטא בה עינא

Additionally, the **Shulchan Aruch** writes that we should place the *schach* in a manner that we can see the stars. That way, we are always reminded **why** we are sitting in the *sukka*—appreciating the fact that we are in God's world.

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן תרלא סעיף ג  
דרך הסיכוך להיות קל, כדי שיראו ממנו (ה) א <ב> הכוכבים הגדולים; היתה מעובה ב כמין בית, (ו) אף על פי שאין הכוכבים נראים מתוכה, [ג] כשרה.

As the **Pri Megadim** explains that gazing at the heavens and seeing the stars reminds us of the majesty and splendor of our Creator, "*ani Hashem Elokeichem*."

פרי מגדים אורח חיים אשל אברהם סימן תרלא,

שיזכור מי ברא אלה ולהיות גר בארץ, כמו שכתוב [תהלים ח, ד] ירח וכוכבים אשר כוננת,

Judaism insists that we cannot--and dare not--treat God **casually**. We must not remember Him only when we happen to need Him or only when His presence jumps out at us. Hence, the commandment of Sukka ends with the words, “*Ani Hashem.*” This mitzva is about reminding us that we must focus on Hashem at all times.

The Torah tells us that the root of Israel’s worst sins is not maintaining their focus on Hashem. This neglect, we are told, will bring on the *tochachah*, that horrible list of punishments, as expressed in the words from Parashas Bechusosai:

ויקרא פרק כו

(כג) ואם באלה לא תוסרו לי והלכתם עמי קרי:

(כד) והלכתי אף אני עמכם בקרי והכיתי אתכם גם אני שבע על חטאתיכם:

“if you will go with me in the way of *keri*, I shall go with you in the way of *keri*...and will punish you...”

**Targum Yonasan** tells us *keri* means *b’mikre*, incidentally:

כתר יונתן ויקרא פרשת בחקותי פרק כו פסוק כג

(כג) ואם באלה המלקות לא תילקו לפני ותלכו לפני במקרה:

Hashem says to the Jewish people: If you treat Me casually, half-heartedly, without attention, that is precisely the way I will treat you—without concern, without worry, and certainly without love.

The *mitzvah* of *sukkah* teaches us this basic principle--that everything we do regarding our spirituality should be thought out and that if we do that, God will act accordingly. The reward for one who goes out of his way to think about God, *mitzvos*, and other people—as the *tochacha* tells us, is that God’s presence will rest among us and protect us.

ויקרא פרק כו

(יא) ונתתי משפני בתוכם ולא תגעל נפשי אתכם:

(יב) והתהלכתל בתוכם והייתי לכם לאלהים ואתם תהיו לי לעם:

And that is what the Jewish people merited in the Midbar. Hashem proactively protected them. He not wait for them to require His assistance. Instead, He created the *ananei hakavod*, a form of Divine protection that preceded them in their journey. And that is why the mitzvah of *sukkah* is observed in Tishrei. We, too, must make special efforts to do the will of God--not in a casual manner-- but in a calculated, deliberate manner.

The mitzvah of Sukkos is unusual because it encompasses so many other actions. Eating in a *sukka* becomes a *mitzvah*. Sleeping in a *sukka* becomes a *mitzva*. Enjoying the company of family and friends in the *sukka* becomes a *mitzva*. This teaches that **everything we do**, even mundane actions, can be elevated if done with mindfulness and an awareness that we are in the presence of Hashem, “*Ani Hashem.*” שויתי ה' לנגדי תמיד

In this way, the *mitzvah* of Sukka reminds us that **everything** we do must be done with thought and careful consideration--while looking at the stars, so to speak; while remembering God. And if we do that, and live our lives with *zehirus*, we can elevate all of our otherwise mundane actions to the level of a *mitzva*. If we learn the lesson of *sukka*-- if we are focus on God in everything we do—that recognition of “*ani Hashem*” can raise all our actions to the status of a *mitzva* and help us merit the divine embrace.

May we all be *zoche* to merit the day when all of mankind will recognize the glory of Hashem. May we celebrate together in a rebuilt Yerushalayim, בירושלים הבנויה, Next year in Jerusalem!