

CLASS 69 - SUKKOS

by Rabbi Heshy Grossman

"And you shall take for yourselves on the first day an Esrog fruit, and a palm branch...." A parable: two parties come before a judge, and we don't know who was victorious. When one comes out with his spear in his hand, we know that he was the victor. Similarly, Klal Yisrael and the nations of the world come before G-d with accusations on Rosh HaShanah, and we don't know who is victorious. When the Bnei Yisrael come out with Esrog and Lulav in their hands, we know that Klal Yisrael has won. Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu commands the Bnei Yisrael: And you shall take for yourselves on the first day an Esrog fruit..." (Vayikra Rabbah 30:2)

We know that Rosh HaShanah is a time of judgment, when every living being stands before G-d. Yet, Chazal teach us more: that this judgment is actually a battle between Klal Yisrael and the nations of the world, and the Sukkos holiday is a time to demonstrate our unique and special status.

In our shiur this week, we will explain this idea, and learn why the many Mitzvos of these days follow in the wake of the Teshuva process.

1

"On the day of Rosh HaShanah, Yitzchak went out alone, and called Esav to prepare cooked foods for all the world.... of that moment it was said: 'and his eyes were too weak for sight', for his offspring was one who would blacken the world. And he was lying on the bed of Din....and Rivka said to Yaakov her son...who was given to her on the day of creation, commanding him to awaken with those foods of his own."

"And Yaakov woke from below, clothed in prayers and requests, and the voice.. of Yaakov arose through the Shofar, awakening Yitzchak and drawing near to him...and he ate from those foods and then smelled the fragrance of his clothing, which were the prayers and requests that arose, and he blessed him...."

"and Esav hated Yakov, following him and accusing him constantly. And Yaakov went in those days between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, and escaped, to save himself from him, repenting with Teshuva and fasting, until Yom Kippur. Then, Israel realizes that Esav is approaching with four hundred men, all prepared to accuse. Immediately "And Yaakov feared greatly".... and he appeased Esav with a gift, whereupon Esav was transformed to a defender of Yaakov. But Yaakov wants not his honey nor his bite, saying "let my master pass before me", until Neilah, when they were

separated from the holy nation...."

"...once the accuser accepts the gift, and is separated from them, Hashem wants to rejoice with His children..."and Yaakov traveled to Sukkos, and built there a home...." And when they dwelled in Sukkos, they were saved from the accusers..." (Zohar)

Each year, this battle between Yaakov and Esav rages anew, with each nation vying for the blessings by which to merit their place in existence. The fateful meeting of the brothers, after Yaakov's return from the house of Lavan, is the paradigm of all subsequent days of atonement. The gift that Esav receives was replicated each year when the Kohen Gadol exiled one goat, half of a brotherly pair, to an ignominious end. And with the loss of the Temple, still, the prayer and repentance of Yom Kippur serve to separate Israel from the nations, and as their forefather Yaakov, they rejoice together with G-d in their temporary dwellings.

Let us explain how the Sukkah embodies all that was achieved in the days of Awe.

2

Rabbeinu Bachya highlights the difference between the two blessings bestowed by Yitzchak:

"There is no mention of G-d in the blessing given to Esav, but in the blessing of Yaakov he states: "And G-d will give you... This teaches that he gave to Esav the best of the earth, and the sustenance, but not as a gift from Hashem as with Yaakov, rather, in accord with the stars and constellations that the descendants of Esav are subject to." (Rabbeinu Bachya, Breishis 27:39)

While the children of Esav are part of the natural world, receiving its abundant bounty, but bound by its physical limitations, the Bnei Yisrael merit a land of their own, a land that stands apart in a dimension of its own:

"And Hashem is the Lord of all gods and the Master of all masters, for all the world. But, Eretz Yisrael, the center of civilization, is His unique portion, singularly His, and He did not provide for it any angels, officers, or rulers when He bequeathed it to His special nation, the descendants of those He loves. As is written: "and you will be to Me a treasured nation, for all the earth is Mine." (Ramban, VaYikra 18:25)

The unique nature of Israel is that it belongs to G-d alone. Its continued existence and security is subject only to His will, and unlike neighboring lands, it will never be guided by the world's natural patterns. Klal Yisrael, inhabitants of this unique place, yearn for more than a few hundred square miles of land, and are not satisfied with a geographic location measured in time and space. They long for a relationship with Hashem, and willingly subject themselves to His word.

This is Israel's portion, and it is this distinction that separates them from the nations. While the descendants of Esav find their place within the cycle of nature, the blessings of eternity belong to the Jewish people, and they find no solace or rest outside the Holy Land. For a nation that lives with

miracles, there can never be a more suitable location.

3

In a similar vein, each individual Jew also has a place of his own, yet some stand apart from others:

"In the place where Baalei Tshuva stand, complete Tzaddikim cannot" (Brachos 34b)

This does not mean that one who repents is greater than the man who never sins. It is not a higher level that he achieves but a different relationship, for the repentant sinner reveals aspects of G-d's interaction with the world that would otherwise remain concealed.

By all human measure of justice, Tshuva should not effectively wipe the slate clean. For this reason, forgiveness can never be issued by a Bais Din of mortal men, though the sinner may very well express full remorse.

Only G-d is capable of finding space for all, with refuge even for the wicked. This Divine gift of atonement enables the sinner to demonstrate that all of mankind can find favor and grace. Despite his every effort to rebel against Hashem, every individual's ultimate end will reflect nothing but Heavenly providence.

This is the Baal Tshuva's place - a mystical location of supernatural guidelines. But, undeserving as he is, he needs a special measure of protection.

This is his Sukkah.

Hence, following Yom Kippur, every Baal Tshuvah enters a temporary abode, wherein the Divine cloud of honor shields him from the dangers of a physical existence.

4

"One of the reasons for the Mitzva of Sukkah is to waken the careful observer...his dwelling in this world is only temporary, as a Sukkah...therefore, Hashem commands us immediately following Yom Kippur to toil with this Mitzva as a hint to man: if you truly want to repent....reflect and understand that this world is vanity, and that you are only passing through. This concept should be with you always, and it alone will suffice to save you from the evil inclination...." (Chida, Simchas HaRegel)

A kosher Sukkah has many unique specifications. One's Sukkah must be produced from 'Psoles Goren V'Yekev' - from the by-products of a vineyard and granary, with the shady area more extensive than that of the sun.

The Vilna Gaon explains the significance of these obligations:

"...all worldly activity, its wealth and bounty, are all from the sun....everything is dependent upon the Mazalos, and the sun stands among them, as is known to the seers. Therefore, the Torah commands: 'when you harvest [your produce]' so as not to be drawn after this world - to make a Sukkah from

the waste of your granary and vineyard; benefiting only from the byproducts and separating yourself from the wealth of this world; to dwell in the shade and not in the sun; to establish your Torah permanently, while your work is by chance...." (commentary to Yonah 4:5)

The Talmud (Avoda Zara 3b) describes a time when the nations of the world will assert their desire to adhere to G-d's will, but they are destined to fail the one test G-d will provide: the Mitzva of Sukkah, leaving it in disgrace to return to the comfort of their physical homes.

The Maharal explains:

"... man leaves his natural home to dwell in the Sukkah, which is a temporary dwelling, for when man leaves his natural home, he no longer dwells among the earthly beings as he previously did. For this reason, man builds a Sukkah, as he now dwells in the shadow of a spiritual abode...."

"...therefore, Hashem said to [the nations], if the Torah is appropriate for you, you must fulfill the Mitzva of Sukkah, to leave your permanent dwellings, which is the natural world."

"but the nations cannot bear this, to leave their natural dwellings...since their every action is directed by the ways of nature..."

"...but the Jewish people are unique in this regard, for they have been taken out of the natural world, and Israel possesses a level separate and distinct from physical nature...." (Maharal, Chidushei Aggados)

One need only to read the latest headlines to recognize that Klal Yisrael lives in a world of their own. The nations of the world have always perceived the presence of the Jewish people as a foreign intrusion.

They are right.

The Jewish people are subject to a different set of rules and regulations and the land of Israel is the place where these guidelines find their most eloquent expression. When we merit to dwell in the heavenly Sukkah, we receive once again the blessings of Yitzchak; rejoicing with G-d throughout a precious holiday, leaving Esav and his world behind. But if we stubbornly cling to a natural existence and lifestyle, the forces of nature will conspire against us, hoping only to drive us into the stormy seas.

Have a Good Yom Tov!

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