

# Meshech Chochmah on the Festival of Succos

## The Succah and the Arba Minim

The mitzvos of the Torah can be divided into two categories:

1. Mitzvos that elevate a person beyond human nature
2. Mitzvos that sanctify and purify human nature

Both of these categories are represented by the two mitzvos of Succos.

### The Succah

After a person has worked in the field for an entire year, plowing, sowing, reaping and harvesting finally gathering his crop into his storehouses, he will naturally feel a great sense of joy and accomplishment. At this stage, he will want nothing more than to return to the comfort of his home and enjoy his success. It is specifically at this point the Torah says to him, “Go out from your permanent abode and move to a temporary dwelling!” This commandment calls upon him to act beyond his nature, entering a more elevated state which exceeds the confines of his physical tendencies. In keeping with the exalted nature of this mitzvah, the Gemara<sup>1</sup> states that the succah enjoys the sanctity equivalent to a *korban*, and the succah itself is forbidden for any benefit other than the mitzvah of dwelling inside.

### The Arba Minim

It is likewise natural for a person to mark the end of the the harvest by parading certain species as part of a celebratory festival. Here, the Torah does not instruct the person to rise above such a tendency. Rather, the mitzvah engages that very tendency, giving it specific guidelines and parameters in accordance with the Highest Wisdom, identifying four specific species with which to rejoice.<sup>2</sup> The sanctification of the joy at this time is set forth in the end of that pasuk:

“וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים – *And you shall rejoice before Hashem, your God, for seven days.*” For this reason, unlike the succah, we do not find that the *arba minim* attain the status of *korban* materials.

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<sup>1</sup> Succah 9a.

<sup>2</sup> Vayikra 23:40.

## Preparatory Acts

The differing nature of these two mitzvos also expresses itself in the way in which they are to be approached. The succah, representing mitzvos that go beyond human nature, requires a preparatory act that will serve to set the person on a higher-than-nature course. Thus, the halachah states that a succah that did not have *schach* placed in it specifically in order for it to serve as a succah is invalid for the mitzvah, even if it meets the halachic requirements of a succah. This idea is known as “תעשה ולא מן העשוי” – You shall make [the succah], and not use one that is ready-made.” On contrast, the *arba minim*, representing mitzvos which sanctify nature itself, require no such preparatory act for the person to attain an orientation towards them. Even though the mitzvah sets very specific guidelines, the basic theme is one with which the person is full accord. Hence, any manner in which the species attain a state where they are kosher for the mitzvah is acceptable, even if not specifically prepared for that goal.<sup>3</sup>

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## Succos and Yetzias Mitzrayim

בַּסֻּכּוֹת תֵּשְׁבוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים... לְמַעַן יִדְעוּ דֹרֹתֵיכֶם כִּי בַּסֻּכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם

*You shall dwell in succos for seven days... In order that your generations will know that I caused the Bnei Yisrael to dwell in succos when I took them out of the land of Mitzrayim. (Vayikra 23:42-43)*

It is interesting to note that out of all the festivals mentioned in perek 23 of Chumash Vayikra, the only one which has *yetzias Mitzrayim* explicitly mentioned in connection with it is Succos! The Meshech Chochmah explains that the full meaning and realization of *yetzias Mitzrayim* is the idea that once Hashem has delivered us from slavery to become His servants, we can never entirely be in servitude to anyone else. Thus, for example, after detailing the different possibilities through which an *eved ivri* goes free,<sup>4</sup> the Torah concludes with the

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<sup>3</sup> Based on Meshech Chochmah to Vayikra 23:42.

<sup>4</sup> I.e. either through buying his freedom by paying off his debt, or by waiting until the Yovel year when he goes free regardless.

words, “כִּי עֲבָדֵי הֵם – For they are My servants,”<sup>5</sup> which the Gemara<sup>6</sup> expounds upon as saying “ולא עבדים לעבדים – and not servants to [other] servants.” In other words, as a consequence of *yetzias Mitzrayim*, the servitude of a Jew to anyone other than Hashem can never be a permanent state. Likewise, the basis of the assurance that Hashem will ultimately redeem the Jewish people from exile is *yetzias Mitzrayim*. Hence, the pasuk at the end of the *tochachah* which warns that the Jewish people could incur exile as a resulting of ignoring the mitzvos, which foretells of their redemption from that exile, states: “וְזָכַרְתִּי לָהֶם בְּרִית רְאשֵׁינִים – I will remember for them the covenant of the earlier ones, whom I took out of Mitzrayim... to be a God unto them.”<sup>7</sup>

The means through which our exclusive connection with Hashem is “activated” is through keeping the mitzvos, which serve to sanctify our physical existence and place us within His protective domain. Almost all mitzvos relate to one part of the body only. An exception to this rule is the mitzvah of appearing before Hashem during the *shalosh regalim*, which is done with the entire body. However, even there, while the entire physical body is involved on the mitzvah, physical existence itself is not, for there is no eating or drinking allowed while performed this mitzvah. The ultimate example of a mitzvah which involves the entire body is that of succah, where not only does the person enter the succah, but his physical existence enters with it, eating drinking and sleeping in the succah. Indeed, the succah commemorates the Clouds of Glory which likewise enveloped our entire existence while we were in the wilderness.

Therefore, since the mitzvah of succah embraces and sanctifies the totality of physical existence, thereby affirming and empowering our connection with Hashem which was initiated when He took us out of Mitzrayim, we can understand why it is specifically in connection with this festival that the concept of *yetzias Mitzrayim* receives explicit mention in the section dealing with the *moadim*.<sup>8</sup>

## בברכת חג שמח!

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<sup>5</sup> Vayikra 25:55.

<sup>6</sup> Bava Metzia 10a.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 26:45.

<sup>8</sup> Based on Meshech Chochmah to Vayikra 32:43.