

The Place of Sukkot in the Cycle of Festivals

By Rav Yehuda Shaviv

I.

Towards the end of the "cycle of the festivals", as presented in parashat Emor, we are faced with a difficulty. The portion itself follows chronological order: First it deals with Shabbat, and then the order of festivals, starting with Pesach (since Nisan serves as the beginning of the year for the Regalim [Rosh Hashana 1:1]), and ending with Sukkot.

Then comes the conclusion of the portion: "These are the feasts of the Lord, which you shall proclaim to be holy gatherings... beside the Sabbaths of the Lord..." (Vayikra 23:37-38).

And then, surprisingly enough, the Torah speaks again about Sukkot: "Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep a feast to the Lord seven days... And you shall take for yourselves on the first day a "pri etz hadar"... you shall dwell in booths seven days... that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths..." (ibid 39-43). And then the closing again: "And Moshe declared to the children of Israel the appointed seasons of the Lord" (ibid 44).

The way in which the Torah divides the discussion about Sukkot is somewhat surprising: part of it is included in the portion dealing with the festivals, and the rest is included afterwards as a sort of addendum. We have dealt with this question before and have suggested some possible solutions (see Shema'tin, vol. 67-68). Here we shall attempt to examine the issue from a new angle.

II.

It appears that Sukkot is a part of two separate cycles:

- a. the cycle of the Regalim (pilgrimage festivals)
- b. the festivals of the month of Tishrei.

On one hand, Sukkot is the third of the Regalim (following Pesach and Shavuot).(1) On the other hand, Sukkot is the culmination of the festivals of the month of Tishrei: Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Sukkot (and Shmini Atzeret).

It may be that the portion of the festivals, Parashat

Emor, is comprised of two cycles. The Three Regalim form the major cycle while the festivals of Tishrei form a minor cycle. The major cycle, on the one hand, encompasses the whole parasha, which opens with the words, "And the Lord spoke to Moshe saying, Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, the feasts of the Lord..." (Vayikra 23:1-2) and closes with "And Moshe declared to the children of Israel the appointed seasons of the Lord" (ibid 44). The minor cycle, on the other hand, is situated in the middle, in parentheses as it were, in pesukim 23-38. Here too we find the closing: "These are the feasts of the Lord...", followed by the rest of the major cycle, which returns to the subject of Sukkot. Hence the structure of parshat hamo'adot is as follows:

- Pesach
- Shavuot
- (Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkot)
- Sukkot

III.

This may enable us to explain the different aspects of the festival of Sukkot. On the one hand, it is a particularly Jewish festival: "Every citizen of Israel should dwell in sukkot in order that your generations may know that I provided shelter the children of Israel in sukkot when I brought them out of the land of Egypt..." (Vayikra 23:42-43).

On the other hand, Sukkot also has a universal aspect, which manifests itself in the sacrifices of the day. As Rabbi Eliezer explains: "These seventy oxen [the total number sacrificed over the seven days of Sukkot] - of whom are they representative? The seventy nations" (Sukka 55b). This aspect of the festival is expressed in the vision of Zekharia concerning the nations of the world, which we read in the haftara of the day: "And it shall come to pass that everyone that is left of all the nations who came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of Sukkot. And whoever does not come up of all the families of the earth to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt does not go up, and does not come, then they shall have no overflow. This shall be the plague, with which the Lord will smite the nations that shall not come up to keep the feast of Sukkot. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that do not come up to keep the feast of Sukkot" (Zekharia 14:16-19).

The "Jewish" aspect of Sukkot is what characterizes it as part of the cycle of the Shalosh Regalim. This cycle is particular to Israel. Pesach is the festival of freedom for Israel from slavery in Egypt, and we are warned: "The stranger shall not eat of it..." (Shemot 12:43-47). Shavuot is the festival of the giving of the Torah, and it is given to Israel specifically. In the same way, Sukkot is a festival for Israel, in order that all future generations will know that God provided the children of Israel with sukkot.

However, Sukkot is also one of the "festivals of Tishrei", the festivals of judgment, and judgment is passed over the entire world, as the Mishna teaches: "On Rosh Hashana all the creatures of the world pass before You as sheep" (Rosh Hashana 1:2). The timing of Rosh Hashana is also a result of its being "the beginning of Your creation, a remembrance of the first day..." (2).

The seventh day of Sukkot represents the final sealing of judgement which was passed on Rosh Hashana (Zohar, Vayikra 31; Shibbolei HaLeket, siman 371; Sefer HaManhig, Hilkhos Etrog, 38). Perhaps even the judgement for water which is passed on this day has some continuity from Rosh Hashana, since water is a basic necessity for life. As a day of judgement, and as part of the festivals of the month of Tishrei, the month of creation, Sukkot is a universal festival.

IV.

The two commandments particular to this festival - sukka and the arba minim - symbolize these two aspects.

The commandment of the sukka is a remembrance of the sukkot in which Bnei Yisrael dwelled during their stay in the desert. There is disagreement among the Tannaim as to the nature of these "sukkot", and the prevailing opinion is that this is a reference to the Ananei HaKavod (divine clouds of glory): "The sukkot mentioned in the Torah, in which Israel dwelled, are a reference to the Ananei HaKavod which surrounded them in order to protect them from the elements" (Tur, Orach Haim, siman 725). But these clouds also served the purpose of providing a protective barrier between Israel and the other nations, thus realizing - even during their sojourn in the desert - the prophecy, "They will be a people which dwells alone and is not counted among the nations." And so the sukka represents the national uniqueness and separateness. Therefore the Torah emphasizes, "every citizen of Israel will dwell in sukkot."

The arba minim, on the other hand, which are waved in all directions, represent the move outwards, in the direction of the nations of the world. Indeed, the arba minim are particularly bound up with the issue of the judgement of this festival - that of water. Everyone joins in the Simhat

HaMayim. The essence of the commandment of the arba minim is in the Temple: "And you shall celebrate before the Lord your God seven days" (Vayikra 23:40). The Temple also has a universalistic aspect in that it is meant to serve as a House of Prayer for all the nations (Yishayahu 56:7). (3) Even the sacrifices of this festival include representation for the nations of the world.

The specifically Jewish side finds expression in the sacrifices of the festival; on Shmini Atzeret, only one ox is sacrificed: "Why one single ox? To represent one single nation" (Sukka 55b).

V.

The proof provided by the two mitzvot of the festival as expressions of its two aspects, and the fact that the essence of the mitzvah of the four species is only realized if it is carried out in the Temple, may be the key to solving our dilemma.

The Yalkut Shimoni comments on the pasuk, "You shall not plant an ashera of any tree near the altar of the Lord your God" (Devarim 16:21) as follows: "Not even a house, not even a sukka." If there could be no sukka near the altar, how, then, how, then, were the kohanim to eat the remains of the menakhot on Hol HaMoed (since eating is forbidden outside a sukka)? (4) We are even more astonished at the following description in the Gemara: "R' Yehoshua ben Hananya said, When we would celebrate the Simhat Beit HaShoeva, we would have no sleep. How was this possible? The first hour was devoted to the Tamid of Shaharit, from there we went on to tefilla... from there to the Tamid of Bein HaArbayim, and from then on was the Simhat Beit HaShoeva" (Sukka 53b).

The Gemara questions this, pointing out that a person cannot manage for even three days consecutively without sleep (as we know it from Rabbi Yohanan's statement regarding an oath) and answers: "Rather, what it means is that we did not sleep properly, but rather dozed on each other's shoulders." There was no proper sleep, but there was dozing. But is dozing not considered as a type of short sleep? Even a short sleep is forbidden outside of a sukka (Sukka 26)!

One answer provides the solution to both of these problems: No sukka was required in the Temple courtyard, neither for sleep nor for eating. There, only one aspect of sukkot is emphasized - not the separate and individual aspect, but rather the breaking down of barriers, the universalistic aspect of the festival.

Perhaps what is meant, however, is something different:

The Temple is itself like a sukka, since the same function which the sukka fulfills for each individual in Israel, is fulfilled by the Temple (and its courtyard) for the nation of Israel. Sitting in the sukka is termed in the Zohar (Vayikra 103) "yeshiva betzila demehimnuta" - sitting in the shade of faith. And there is no place more worthy of being considered the seat of faith than the Beit HaMikdash.

VI.

"One of the characteristics of Sukkot is simcha (joy): Although we are commanded to rejoice on every festival, on Sukkot there was additional joy in the Temple, as it is written: "You shall rejoice before The Lord your God seven days"... It is a mitzva to be abundantly joyful..." (Rambam, Hilkhos Lulav, 8:12ff)

The extra joy of the festival seems to be derived from the accumulated joy from the other Regalim, together with the joy of the Yamim Noraim (since even the latter are festivals, and are celebrated with joy). We learn this both from Torah and from Hazal. Ezra and Nehemia told the nation on Rosh Hashana, "Go your way, eat well and drink sweet drinks and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared... for the joy of the Lord is your strength." (Nehemia 8:10). And so it was: "And all the people went their way to eat and to drink and to send portions and to make a great celebration..." (ibid 12).

And Hazal teach with regard to Yom Kippur: "There were no joyous days in Israel... like Yom Kippur" (Mishna, end of Taanit).

Thus the days of Sukkot are the epitome of all the festivals of the year, and the joy of these days is the culmination of the joy of all the festivals.

Footnotes:

(1) Alternatively it may be that the two festivals that comprise Sukkot - Sukkot and Shmini Atzeret - parallel Pesach and Shavuot, as indicated by Pesikta deRabi Kahana, piska 28, on the pasuk: "BaYom ha-Shmini Atzeret" (Bamidbar 29:35): "Just as the atzeret of Pesach is fifty days away from Pesach, so this atzeret should be fifty days away. So why is it adjacent to Sukkot... because after Sukkot the rains begin and the roads are difficult to travel." According to this, the seven days of Sukkot parallel the seven days of Pesach, and Shmini Atzeret parallels Shavuot.

(2) Yom Kippur is the day on which forgiveness culminates for ISRAEL (Rambam, Hilkhos Teshuva, 2:7) for it is the day upon which Moshe descended from Har Sinai with the second tablets and the message that God had forgiven the nation. It is also

the day of the re-giving of the Torah (end of Masekhet Taanit), which is particular to Israel. But the obligation of the day, that of Teshuva, is incumbent on the entire world, as expressed by the haftara which we read at Mincha and which deals with the Teshuva of non-Jews - the population of Ninveh.

(3) Also, Sukkot was celebrated already in the desert, and we remember those sukkot. The mitzva of the arba minim, on the other hand, seems to have become obligatory only when Bnei Yisrael entered their land. While walking in the desert they were a "solitary nation," but with the entry into the land they were faced with the challenge of becoming a kingdom of priests and a light unto the nations. For this reason the Torah was written in seventy languages (see Sota 36a).

(4) On this question see the discussion in Dvar Malkhut by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Erev Shabbat Ki Tetze 5751.

(Translated by Karen Fish.)

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