

The Borders of Eretz Yisrael Encompassed in Your Sukkah

The Abarbanel's Revolutionary Approach to Sukkos

BY RABBI DANIEL GLATSTEIN



There is a custom to display in the *sukkah* samples of the *shivas hamimim*, seven species, with which Eretz Yisrael is praised. The origin of this custom is not readily identified, but as all *minhagei Yisrael* are rooted in holy sources, let us endeavor to discover the meaning of this practice.

The pasuk tells us, "You shall make the Festival of Sukkos for a seven-day period, when you gather in from your threshing floor and from your wine cellar" (Devarim 16:13). The letter "*taf*" as the prefix to a *shoresh*, word root, adds the directive "you shall" to the action mentioned. Usually, when the Torah employs this prefix, it is to issue a command, a mitzvah that we are directed to do. Thus, the *pasuk* can be read as an instruction from the Torah. However, this prefix can also be interpreted not as a directive, but as a declaration that you will do it.

The sefer *Yaffeh LaLev*, by Rav Chaim Palagi, quotes a *Pesikta* that interprets this *pasuk* using both interpretations. The *pasuk* could have written the instruction beginning with the word *asei*, make, without using the prefix *taf*. The fact that the *taf* is added tells us that the *pasuk* means, "You are to make the *sukkah*, and if you do, you have a *havtachah*, assurance, from Hashem that you will continue to do so for years to come." It is both a command to celebrate the *yom tov* and a *bracha* that if you do keep the *yom tov*, you will be enabled to continue to keep the *yom tov* in years to come. The Kaf HaChaim, Rav Yaakov Chaim Sofer, quotes this *Pesikta*, including the promise of being blessed to continue to sit in the

sukkah in the future.

The Abarbanel also quotes this *drasha* of the *Pesikta*. When Yitzchak Avinu was born, Avraham Avinu made a *seudah* at his *bris* (Bereishis 21:8). The Midrash Rabbah states that the *malachim*, in the guise of men, attended the *seudah*. The Abarbanel points out that the *pasuk* makes no mention of the *malachim* having attended this *seudah*. How, then, does the Midrash know that the *malachim* attended? He explains that the source is the *malachim*'s response when Avraham welcomed them into his home and invited them to partake in a meal. He told them, "Let some water be brought and wash your feet and recline beneath the tree. I will fetch a morsel of bread that you may sustain yourselves, then go on — inasmuch as you have passed your servant's way" (Bereishis 18:4-5). The *malachim*'s response to his invitation was, "Do so, just as you have said" (ibid., v. 5).

Based on the prefix *taf*, Chazal interpret this to mean that they were saying "do this now" — i.e., feed us now — "and you will feed us again in a year." They were predicting that they would come to the *seudah* to celebrate Yitzchak's *bris milah*. Says the Abarbanel, this is similar to how the *Pesikta* interprets the *pasuk* above. This is also found in the Ran in Parshas Vayeira.

Interestingly, despite the *Pesikta* being quoted by several sources, this explanation is actually absent from the text of the *Pesikta* that is available to us. This lost passage has been preserved for posterity by the Abarbanel and the Ran, and we can invoke the statement, "Blessed is the Omnipresent [Hashem], Who entrusted His world to guardians."

A Segulah for a Long Life

This *midrash* is teaching that the mitzvah of the *sukkah* carries with it a special *bracha* for *arichas yamim*, longevity. Each year that a person fulfills the mitzvah of *sukkah*, he is granted a new *havtachah* that he will survive at least another year to fulfill the mitzvah again.

The *pasuk* states, "You shall dwell in *Sukkos* [booths] for a seven-day period; every *ezrach* [native] in Israel shall dwell in booths (Vayikra 23:42). The term *ezrach* is unique to the mitzvah of dwelling in the *sukkah*. Rav Naftali of Ropshitz teaches that this word is used here to convey a message. The word *ezrach* refers to an elderly person. Hashem is thus promising that one who keeps the mitzvah of dwelling in the *sukkah* will, in fact, live to a ripe old age and will merit to fulfill the mitzvah of *sukkah* even as a *zakein*, elder.

The *gematria* of the word *ezrach* is numerically equivalent to the *gematria* of the word *gevurah*, as both equal 216. The significance of this is that the *pasuk* states, "The days of our years among them are seventy, and if with might, eighty years" (Tehillim 90:10). Sitting in the *sukkah* is a *segulah* that one will live to be an *ezrach*, which is achieved at the age of *gevurah*: Sit in the *sukkah*, and you'll live to be at least eighty.

Rav Chaim Palagi quotes the *Zohar*, who says that the *sukkah* resembles the letter *beis*. A *sukkah* must have three walls, as does the letter *beis*. The letter *beis* composed of three *vavs* and is thus numerically equivalent to eighteen, the value of the word *chai*, life. The mitzvah of *sukkah* shields and protects us, and taking refuge in the shade of Hashem's *emunah* gives us

longevity. In the merit of fulfilling the mitzvah of *sukkah*, we will be *zocheh* to *arichas yamim*, as alluded to by the fact that the *sukkah* resembles the letter *beis*.

Why is fulfilling the mitzvah of *sukkah* a *segulah* for a long life? There are many very significant mitzvos that we do not find provide a person with this gift. What is unique about the mitzvah of *sukkah* so that one who sits in the *sukkah* is promised a long life?

Like Sitting in Eretz Yisrael

Hashem promised the Jewish people that He would save them from Mitzrayim: *v'hotzeisi*, I will take you out of Egypt; *v'hitzalti*, I will rescue you from Egypt; *v'ga'alti*, I will redeem you; *v'lakachi*, I will take you for My own, as My people; *v'he'veisi*, I will bring you into Eretz Yisrael (see Shemos 6:6-8). The first four promises were fulfilled, and Hashem saved us from Egypt. He gave us the Torah and acquired us as His chosen nation.

However, Tiferes Shlomo points out that the fifth promise, *v'he'veisi*, did not come true with regard to the generation to whom it was promised. Seemingly, Hashem fulfilled only four out of these five promises to the *Yidden* who were enslaved in Egypt. Hashem promised that generation that He would bring them into Eretz Yisrael. But this did not take place.

In the instructions regarding the *yom tov* of *Sukkos*, the Torah tells us, "So that your generations will know that I caused Bnei Yisrael to dwell in booths when I took them from the land of Egypt; I am Hashem, your G-d" (Vayikra 23:43). The last phrase of the *pasuk* seems superfluous. We all

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know that Hashem is our G-d. Why does the Torah feel the need to remind us that Hashem is our G-d specifically amid the commandments of Sukkos?

The Gemara discusses what factor enables one to live a long life. R' Yochanan was told there were elderly men living in Bavel. R' Yochanan responded that this cannot be true, since the pasuk states, "In order to prolong your days and the days of your children upon the Land that Hashem has sworn to your forefathers to give them, like the days of Heaven over the earth" (Devarim 11:21). Living long is therefore a feature of *ha'adamah*, the Land of Eretz Yisrael! R' Yochanan infers that one who is not in Eretz Yisrael cannot expect to live long! Thus, it cannot be that old people live in Bavel. However, after R' Yochanan was informed that these elderly people came to shul early and left shul late, he agreed that in this *zechus* there could be old people in Bavel. R' Yehoshua ben Levi instructed his son to come early to shul and to stay later afterward so that he would live long.

The Maharsha is troubled by this Gemara. R' Yochanan provides a *pasuk* to prove that longevity can occur only in Eretz Yisrael; how does one's shul attendance counter the inference of the *pasuk*? The Maharsha's novel conclusion is that a shul must be considered as having the equivalent spiritual status of Eretz Yisrael. In the future, when Mashiach comes, the shuls will be transported to Eretz Yisrael. Since they will eventually be there, the shuls already have the status of Eretz Yisrael. Therefore, one who spends a long time in shul will live long. Staying in shul and breathing the air is tantamount to actually breathing in the air of Eretz Yisrael.

Rav Dovid Shapiro (the son of the Bnei Yissaschar) writes that the *pasuk*, "So that your generations will know that I caused Bnei Yisrael to dwell in booths when I took them from the land of Egypt; I am Hashem, your G-d" teaches us that just as a shul has the same status as Eretz Yisrael, so too does the sukkah! Sitting in a sukkah is equivalent to sitting in *kedushas* Eretz Yisrael, the holiness of Eretz Yisrael.

There is a fundamental difference between Eretz Yisrael and all the other countries in the world. Every other land has an intermediary between it and the Ribbono shel Olam; it has a ministering angel that serves as a go-between, connecting Hashem and the people. The Jews in Eretz Yisrael, however, enjoy a unique relationship directly with Hashem. There is no intermediary. This explains the Gemara that states that one who resides in Eretz Yisrael is considered to have a G-d, while someone who dwells in *chutz l'Aretz* is considered to

be G-dless.

The purpose of the sukkah is for us to sit in the direct shade of Hashem: *b'tzila d'm'heimenu*. This direct connection to Hashem and His Presence is reminiscent of living in Eretz Yisrael, where the inhabitants continuously enjoy this direct relationship with Him.

As Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim, Hashem enveloped them in the protection of Clouds of Glory, representative of Eretz Yisrael, so that the Jewish people would already have the benefits of living in the Land; as we know, the Gemara states, "the air of Eretz Yisrael makes a person wise."

limbs: dwelling in Eretz Yisrael and sitting in the sukkah. These are the only two mitzvos during which our entire body enters into the *cheftzah* of the mitzvah. This is hinted at in the pasuk that states, "Then His Tabernacle, sukkoh, was in Jerusalem, b'Shalem, and His Dwelling in Tzion" (Tehillim 76:3). When can you do a mitzvah *b'sheleinu*, with the entirety of your being? Only in the sukkah or in *Tzion*, Eretz Yisrael. Furthermore, a person is not considered *shaleim*, complete, until he has fulfilled these two mitzvos.

One might find this concept troubling, however, since one might think that im-

mersing in a *mikveh* is yet another mitzvah that one enters into with his entire body! However, the Ran explains (in the name of the Ramban) that immersing in the *mikveh* is, in itself, not a mitzvah. It is only *machshirei mitzvah*, the preparation to a mitzvah. In addition,

and all the *eivarim*, it is only fitting that it is hinted to with the word *ba'kol*.

The Bnei Yissaschar calculates the *gematria* of the word sukkah with the letters spelled *b'milui*, in full. The total is 248, the number of limbs we use to fulfill the mitzvah.

Sitting in the sukkah not only allows one to fulfill one of the two mitzvos that can be performed with the entirety of a person. Since, as noted above, the sukkah is considered to be a part of Eretz Yisrael, by sitting in the sukkah a person simultaneously fulfills both mitzvos that uniquely are performed with one's entire body: living in Eretz Yisrael and sitting in the sukkah!

We can thus interpret the *pasuk*, "Then His Tabernacle, sukkoh, was in Jerusalem, b'Shalem, and His Dwelling in Tzion" to mean that if one wants to perform a mitzvah with *sheleinu*, he should sit in the sukkah. Why? Because sitting in the *sukkah* is tantamount to living in Eretz Yisrael.

The sukkos in which Bnei Yisrael lived during their sojourn in the *Midbar* were microcosms of Eretz Yisrael; as we have seen, dwelling in the sukkos is considered as if they were living in Eretz Yisrael. Thus, the sukkos themselves are the fulfillment of the promise of *V'heiveisi!* Bringing Bnei Yisrael into their sukkos was equivalent to bringing them into Eretz Yisrael, as Hashem had promised.

A Temporary Dwelling

The *sukkah* is termed a *diras a'rai*, temporary dwelling. There is profound hidden meaning in this phrase. The borders of Eretz Yisrael are listed in the Gemara: *Rekem*, in the east; *Ashkelon*, in the south; *Acco*, in the north. Rashi states that the western border is the *Yam*, the Mediterranean Sea.

The Rambam writes that these are the borders of Eretz Yisrael with regard to all halachos that pertain to Eretz Yisrael. Rav Shem Klingberg reveals that the *roshei teivos*, initial letters, of the four borders of Eretz Yisrael spell the word *a'rai*! The *sukkah* is considered a *diras a'rai* because sitting in it is tantamount to sitting within the boundaries of Eretz Yisrael.

Rav Klingberg adds that by giving us the mitzvah of sitting in the sukkah, the temporary dwelling, Hashem demonstrates His love for us. By fulfilling the mitzvah of sukkah, we are sitting in His Land, in Eretz Yisrael, where the *Shechinah* dwells. Incredibly, the *gematria* of *diras a'rai* is the same as that of *ha'bocher b'amno Yisroel b'ahava* (*Ahavas Olam*).

This is an incredible gift that Hashem bestows on us: He gives us the mitzvah of sukkah, which, when performed anywhere

Sitting in the sukkah is a segulah that one will live to be an *ezrach*, which is achieved at the age of gevurah.

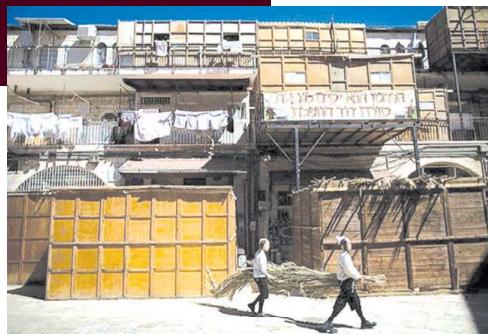
We commemorate this concept by dwelling in *sukkos* that will give us the same benefit: a direct and personal relationship with Hashem.

That is why the *pasuk* concludes with the words, "I am Hashem, your G-d." The *pasuk* is stating that when you sit in a sukkah, which is equivalent to sitting in Eretz Yisrael, it will be considered that you indeed have a G-d. At least during the week of Sukkos, one who dwells in a sukkah will achieve the level of closeness to Hashem as those who live in Eretz Yisrael, since the *sukkah* itself is a microcosm of Eretz Yisrael, with all its *kedushah*.

With regard to residing in Eretz Yisrael, the Torah relates, "You will prolong your days in Eretz Yisrael." By extension, one who resides in the sukkah, a microcosm of Eretz Yisrael, will also merit long life. Sitting in the virtual Eretz Yisrael will provide the same *bracha* as residing in the actual Eretz Yisrael.

With All Your Limbs

The Vilna Gaon writes that there are only two mitzvos in the Torah that one fulfills with his entire body, with all 248



the Kesef Mishnah writes that one becomes *tahor* only upon exiting the *mikveh*, not upon entering it, and therefore the fulfillment of the *tevilah* is not when one enters or is immersed in the *mikveh* but upon emerging.

We know that the Avos kept the entire Torah. The Vilna Gaon was asked how we know that the Avos observed Sukkos. He replied that we know it from the *pasuk*, "Now Avraham was old, well on in years, and Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything, *ba'kol*" (Bereishis 24:1). The word *ba'kol* stands for the three phrases in the Torah that discuss the mitzvah of sukkah.

The mitzvah of sukkah is hinted at with the word *ba'kol*, with everything, because it is one of the two mitzvos that can be fulfilled with all of your body! Your *ba'kol*, your entire being, can fulfill the mitzvah of sukkah; therefore, since the mitzvah of sukkah is performed with the entire *guf*

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in the world, is equivalent to actually living in Eretz Yisrael and encompasses the *brachos* of Eretz Yisrael, such as longevity!

Zman Simchaseinu

This concept also helps us understand why Sukkos is referred to as Zman Simchaseinu, *the time of our rejoicing*.

Rav Meir Shapiro states that there is no *simcha* comparable to that of entering Eretz Yisrael. This is hinted at in the Torah in the pasuk, "And it will be when you enter the Land [Eretz Yisrael]" (Devarim 26:1). The Ohr HaChaim teaches that the term *vehayah* is a reference to *simcha*, to a time of joy and happiness. Coming to Eretz Yisrael is the ultimate *simcha*.

We also see this in Sefer Bereishis. When Yaakov Avinu left Eretz Yisrael, the *pasuk* says that he poured oil, whereas

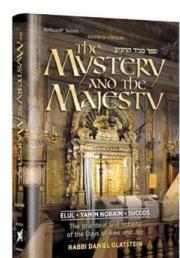
when he returned to Eretz Yisrael he poured both oil and wine. As we know, "wine

rejoices the heart of man"; thus, his utilizing wine on his return was symbolic of the exceptional *simcha* he experienced as he entered Eretz Yisrael.

Sukkos is called Zman Simchaseinu, *the time of our*

rejoicing, because the sukkah is a microcosm of Eretz Yisrael. Entering the sukkah is tantamount to entering Eretz Yisrael, and it is therefore a time of great joy.

The Tur teaches that the yom tov of Sukkos corresponds to Yaakov Avinu. The Belzer Rebbe explains the depth of this analogy. When Yaakov left Eretz Yisrael and passed the *makom HaMikdash*, the future site of the Beis HaMikdash, Hash-



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Sitting in a sukkah is equivalent to sitting in kedushas Eretz Yisrael, the holiness of Eretz Yisrael.

em moved the *makom* to Yaakov's location. This incident is an example of the *kedushah* of Eretz Yisrael being situated somewhere other than its actual space. This is exactly what takes place in the

sukkah: The *kedushah* of Eretz Yisrael joins us wherever we build our sukkah.

Let us add one precious nugget that will deepen our understanding of this exhilarating concept. The Abarbanel writes that Hashem gave us *Shalosh Regalim* to correspond to three amazing kindnesses that He showered upon us. The yomim tovim allow us to display *hakaras hatov*, gratitude, to Hashem for these kindnesses.

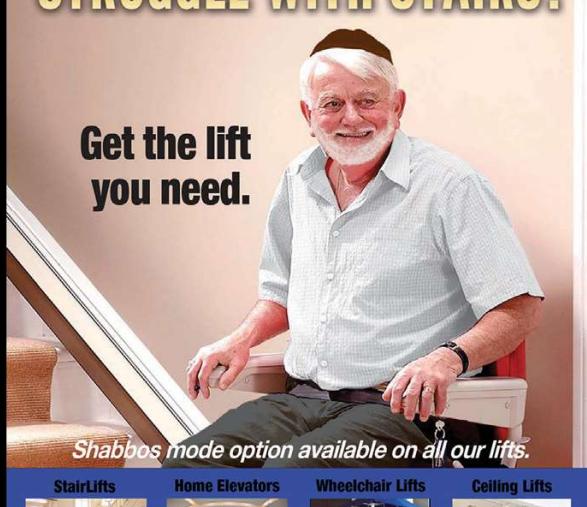
The three extraordinary gifts that Hashem gave the Bnei Yisrael are *Yetziyas Mitzrayim*, *Matan Torah*, and Eretz Yisrael. Pesach is a yom tov of gratitude toward Hashem for having taken us out of Egypt. On Shavuos, we display *hakaras hatov* toward Hashem for having given us the Torah. Sukkos is the yom tov when we show our appreciation to Hashem for having given us Eretz Yisrael and its produce.

We may suggest that on Sukkos, which is when we collectively thank Hashem for having given us Eretz Yisrael, Hashem elevates our sukkah to the status of Eretz Yisrael. Furthermore, writes the Abarbanel, the reason Sukkos has seven days is to celebrate the *Shivas HaMinim*, seven species, with which Eretz Yisrael is blessed. This is a possible explanation for the custom to display the *Shivas HaMinim* in the *Sukkah*.

May we be zocheh to the bracha of *Chag hasukkah taaseh lecha* and in the merit of sitting in the *sukkah* this year, may we be zocheh to sit in the *sukkah* again, for many years to come. ▲

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