

Kohelet: Justice & Brotherhood

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

King Shlomo says in Kohelet, "I saw all the oppression that would be under the sun and the tears of those who were oppressed, who have no comforters. I saw that they have no power to escape the hands of those who oppress them and no one comforts them." Rashi says this refers to the wicked who will feel oppressed in *gehinom*. Initially, they will not see the justice of their punishment. "Under the sun," refers to the brilliance and brightness of the Torah's clarity. They'll resent the fact that they did not have a sense of the Torah's clarity as they suffer the pain of *gehinom*.

Sometimes we fantasize about situations in which our sense of truth is distorted by our emotions. The source of this is the animal soul. After death, an animal descends and doesn't rise. It has no future. The different animal offerings represented different aspects of the animal soul which were liberated or redirected. There's a part of us that's like a goat, hedonistic and desire oriented. This is the source of many of our fantasies. A sheep symbolizes, "Everyone is doing it, so I have to do it too." The cow represents the, "Eat, drink,

sleep, mode," and the ram is the part of us that needs to lead. Controlling one's fantasy life means asking oneself, "Is this true? Where am I and who am I?" Dimyon (fantasy) and *sechel* (logic) can't coexist. When a person does battle with his *dimyon* he gets *sechel hanikna* – acquired logic. It becomes almost instinctive until all illusions fade. In *gehinom* people feel oppressed by the failure of illusions to sustain them and by the brilliance of Torah pointing them out what the truth is. *Gehinom* is a *chesed* because it allows the soul to disengage from the fantasies of this world so that one's core self, *sechel hanikna*, is revealed.

Shlomo Hamelech says, "I prefer those who already passed through this world then those who are living and still struggling in this world to attain the illusions and fantasy that define their lives." The dead are in a state of potential enlightenment as they move closer to the truth. The living are digging their holes deeper and deeper. When a person is spiritually dead they are not making choices anymore. When they repent, they reopen the gates. Kohelet continues, "And I returned and

meditated again and saw foolishness under the sun." This refers to a person who invests all his efforts in working to earn more money. He enjoys the feeling of achievement, power, and entitlement. But in the end where will it all go? Where is his joy and spiritual achievement? *Kesef* comes from the root word, *kisof*, to yearn. *Zahav* can be read as *ze hav* give me. People run after money because it spells status, security, and control. But as soon as money becomes an end in itself it loses its value.

"Two are better than one." Rashi explains that in every endeavor it's always better to share it with someone else. The first commandment in the Torah is to marry. Chazal tells us to acquire a friend. We were created to imitate Hashem who is always giving. We too must give to others. If a person makes a mistake, only someone close to him will care enough to correct him. Life is not about *sheleimut* (perfection), it's about progress. The only way up is through failure and getting up again. It's at our low points when we need encouragement to rise again, that a devoted spouse or close friend proves invaluable.

Sukkot: Service of the Mind and Heart

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

Every Jewish holiday usually has one primary *mitzvah*. Rosh Hashana has *shofar*, Pesach has *matzah*, and Chanukah has candles. On Sukkot, however, we have double *mitzvos*. The Shem Mishmuel asks, why did we have the double libation of water and wine on the altar and the double primary *mitzvot* of the four species and *sukkah* on Sukkot? He explains that Chassidut focuses on *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neschama*, the physical, emotional, and intellectual components that make up the human personality.

Rosh Hashana literally means the head of the year. It's the ultimate day of *cheshbon hanefesh*, an accounting of the soul, when Hashem assesses our deeds. Rosh Hashana parallels Moshe, the mind of Torah, while Aharon, the heart of the Jewish people embodies the emotional day of divine love, Yom Kippur. The holiday of Sukkot is a combination of the mind and heart. It contains the Rosh Hashana message of the committed

holly mind combined with the ecstasy of the heart on Yom Kippur. That is why the holiday has *mitzvot* in tandem. *Sukkah* is a *mitzvah* of *ahava*. It's comparable to the holy of holies when Hashem lovingly invites us into His home. The *lulav* is *rosh*. It represents straight logic and truth. Similarly, wine, a drink that arouses emotion, signifies heart, while water symbolizes Torah knowledge and truth. Since Sukkot is a combination of mind and heart there's a doubling of *mitzvot*.

The Shem Mishmuel asks, the *sukkah* commemorates the clouds of glory that surrounded the Jewish people in the desert. Why is there no commemoration for the other two miracles, the well of Miriam and the *mohn*? The Shem Mishmuel explains that *mohn*, the food of angels, represents pure intellect. The well of water symbolizes emotions. The clouds of glory served as physical protection from enemies. The *mohn* came in the merit of Moshe who gave us the

Torah. The well came in the merit of Miriam who represents emotional connection to Hashem. Aharon, who took care of the physical needs of every Jew, brought the gift of the clouds of glory.

The *mitzvah* of *sukkah* is *makif* (surrounds us) with holiness. *Chassidut* teaches that the highest spiritual levels can be attained through physical *mitzvot*. If one can bring *kedusha* into the lowest places one has accomplished far more than doing so at a higher level. The *mohn* and the well helped the Jews emotionally and logically find Hashem. But they didn't last because they didn't reach the lowest physical levels. The clouds of glory, which assisted the Jews at the lowest physical level, is commemorated for all time through the *mitzvah* of *sukkah*.

Not everyone can reach the lofty emotional and intellectual levels of other *mitzvot*, but anyone can walk into a *sukkah*, have a cup of



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coffee and a piece of cake, and fulfill the *mitzvah* of sitting in a *sukkah*. We commemorate Aharon and the clouds of glory because the melding of spiritual and physical is the highest level a Jew can reach. The *sukkah*

has a double numerical value of *Havaya* (mercy) and *Adnut* (judgment) signifying that *sukkah* is totality. It's a holiday where separate notions are combined, where mind and heart, mercy and judgment become one.

Best wishes for a *chag sameach* and a blessed, fruitful, New Year!

Sukkot: Reaching For The Stars

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

The Mishna asks, if one cannot see the stars through the top of the *sukkah*, is the *sukkah* kosher? Beit Shammai says no, and Beit Hillel says yes.

The Leket V'halibuv notes that there's a deeper message here. On a metaphysical level we have to see the stars within ourselves. We have to find our inherent greatness. Commenting on the verse, "*U'matzdikei harabim k'kochavim*," the Gemara says that people who teach little children are called stars. When one looks at a star it seems very small but in reality it's a vast mass. Those who teach *aleph beit* to small kids are looked down upon, when in reality the whole world rests on them. This is true of each one of us. A person must recognize his incredible potential and believe in the greatness of his soul. The Arizal notes that the minimum halachic requirement of the *sukkah* is two sides and a bit of the third side, similar to a hug. The *sukkah* represents Hashem embracing us. We have to recognize that Hashem believes in us, that we can have a loving relationship with Him and that we can all shine like extraordinary stars.

Rashi explains that *kochvei hachama* are the rays of the sun that must come into the *sukkah*. It symbolizes the divine light that comes into our life. A Jew has to sense Hashem's presence every moment of his existence. The Rambam says the *kochvei hachama* are brilliant stars that can be seen even when the sun shines.

Rashi's view is what comes into the *sukkah*. The Rambam's view sees beyond the *sukkah*. The physical world blocks out spirituality. We have to look behind the mask and recognize Hashem in this world. The *schach*, the top of the *sukkah*, is the break between this world and the heavenly world. The *sukkah* gives us

the ability to pierce through the thick darkness to perceive Hashem's light. It tells us to strive for something higher, to move beyond the here and now and discover a world of greatness. After the High Holy days it is as if Hashem says, "You've attained such high spiritual levels. I want you to concretize this. Go out of your home. Look up at the heavens and see the spiritual potential within yourself. Reach for that vision of greatness." When we sit in our *sukkah* we have to be able to see the great stars, even when the sun is shining. In the physical world of cause and effect we have to be able to look up and recognize the stars.

The Rambam asks, what was so severe about the sin of the *ben sorer umore* (the rebellious son) that he was put to death? He answers that he was held accountable for not living a life of holiness, for not fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *u'bo sidbak* (And you shall cleave to Him). This seems perplexing. Most of us aren't holding at that level either. The Siftei Chaim answers that if a person has a vision of the goal he wants to reach, he's able to direct all his actions towards that goal. You can't be a true servant of Hashem unless you have objectives you want to reach. The problem of the *ben sorer umore* was that he didn't have the vision of where he wanted to go. He was so caught up in the here and now that he lost sight of his true purpose. As we look up at the *kochavei chamah*, we must ask ourselves what our spiritual goals are.

The Michtav M'Eliyahu points out that if a person believes he will reach a certain level or acquire a certain spiritual attribute, then to some extent he's already reached his objective. When a person is unsuccessful, it has nothing to do with ability. His problem is his vision. Did he aim for the stars? When we sit in the *sukkah* we have to ask ourselves, "Do I recognize my inner light? What do I hope to become?" Hashem's first

words to the first Jew Avraham was, "*Lech lecha*," Go to yourself, move forward, never stand still. Rabbi Frand writes that there are two images of every person, one in heaven of what he could be, and one on earth of where he is at the moment. Our mission on this earth is to meld these two images together. The Midrash says when an episode begins with *Vayeishev* (he sat) it's a sign of foreboding. The Maharal explains that sitting in one place spells calamity. A Jew must constantly push forward, grow, and reach new levels of achievement.

We live in such a superficial technologically driven world that it's hard to think in a deep meaningful way. On *Sukkot* we take ourselves out of that world. The Rambam says see the stars, be inspired, and pursue your visions. Rashi says bring the spiritual light in a measured form into your life. Too much light makes the *sukkah* invalid. We must allow in just enough light to be able to take the vision and work with it, to live above the *schach*, to have vision and passion and unify it with our soul. There has to be *achdut* between the body and soul, between the vision and bringing it in to the world of reality.

If passion and ambition and knowing our goals is the prerequisite in the world of the stars, what is the prerequisite in bringing it down to reality, in allowing the sun rays to impact us? The Gemara says nothing stands in the way of desire. In the path we want to go we will be successful. When a person has a vision he must then have the will to bring it to reality. We should never give up on the stars. We can reach them. If we really believe in our visions and have the desire to fulfill them, we will. This *Sukkot*, may we take the *sukkah* experience as an inspiration to move beyond ourselves and may the rays of Hashem's love illuminate our way.