

Love Beyond Reason #4

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The Shem MiShmuel asks, why on Hoshana Rabba do the *aravot* (willow leaves) play the central role?

The Midrash explains that each of the species represent a different type of Jew. The *etrog* (citron fruit), which has a good flavor and scent, represents the *tzaddik* who has both Torah wisdom and good deeds. The *lulav* (palm branch), which has a good flavor, but no scent, signifies a person with wisdom but no good deeds. The *hadassim* (myrtle branches), which have a good fragrance but no flavor, symbolize a person with good deeds but no wisdom. The *aravot* (willow branches), have neither flavor nor fragrance, which signifies a person who lacks both good deeds and Torah wisdom.

We find a similar idea hidden in the *ketoret* (incense offering). There were eleven spices, one of which was the *chelbana*, which exuded an unpleasant odor. However, when combined with the other ten spices it added a tasteful pungency to the mixture. On Sukkot, we take the four species and symbolically proclaim that every Jew, no matter what level he's at, has something to contribute to *k'lal Yisrael*.

On Hashana Rabbah, only the *aravot* are

taken. This teaches us the absolute love Hashem has for every Jew, even the most wicked. Hashem chose us, exercising a choice unbound by logic, and he will never abandon us. Our relationship is otherworldly, something that cannot be contained in words. And just as Hashem remains loyal to us, we must love every Jew regardless of his level.

While Yom Kippur is an island of sanctity, isolated from the rest of the year, Hoshana Rabbah contains elements of the weekday. A lot of the influence of Yom Kippur has worn off by the time we get to the end of Sukkot. On Hashana Rabbah, we tell Hashem, "We want to be good, but the complexities of life make it difficult. Give us a free gift and forgive our sins."

During the times of the *beit hamikdash*, the Jews would circle the altar with the *aravot*. This signifies that even if we fall to the lowest depths like the *aravot*, Hashem will lift us to the level of the altar. Large *aravot* were placed on the altar. The *aravot* were offered as a sacrifice, just as we offer our own human weaknesses to Hashem. In a sense Hoshana Rabbah goes beyond Yom Kippur. On this day it is as if Hashem tells us, "My children, you are not lost, despite your failings."

Our sages teach us that Shemini Atzeret, the eighth day of Sukkot, is a holiday of its own. Seven signifies the cycle of nature, while eight represents something supernatural. It's wrong for a person to think, "This is the way I am. I cannot improve." On the contrary, we can transform ourselves because there is something extraordinary beyond nature inside each of us. Torah study, prayer, and kind deeds empower us to repent. While angels remain stagnant, people have the ability to reach unimaginable heights.

When the *beit hamikdash* stood, the Jews would form a human wall and encircle the altar with the four species. A wall is like an environment. There are terrible environments that must be shattered and good environments that must be built. Walking around with the *lulav* and *etrog* is akin to destroying negative barriers. Encircling the altar with the Torah is like erecting a wall of sanctity. The Zohar writes that the female side of the satan is called *yilila*. This also means wailing because sadness is fundamental to evil. The opposite is also true. Therefore, the last day of the holiday is Simchat Torah. Torah signifies *simcha* (happiness). We rejoice with Hashem's love and with the privilege to build a wall of holiness and sanctity to last us through the coming year.

Bringing Torah To Life: Sukkot & Simchat Torah #2

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Sukkot is a colorful holiday chock full of meaning for children. A good way to get kids involved is to have them decorate the sukkah. Sometimes this could however take on an energy of its own. Therefore we should explain to them that the sukkah is holy, that we are beautifying it for the Shechina, and that we are working so hard to make it pretty in honor of Yom Tov. Very young children won't understand the deeper concepts behind the four species. We could however explain to them that just as each of the species is different so too Hashem helps us in a lot of different ways. He also created varying kinds of people and each one is a part of the Jewish nation.

Older children can grasp the kedusha related to the arba minim and the sukkah. Try to listen to shiurim which explain the depth of the holiday such as Rav Tzvi Meir Zilberger's sichos. You can then simplify it for your children. Tell them about the love between the Jewish people and Hashem, the encompassing nature of the Shechina, and about the concept of Hashem Hu Elokim-He is with us in every possible way of being. Sukkot is about bitachon and about how much Hashem loves us and watches over us. Tell them how Hashem acts like our sukkah and is constantly enveloping us in His protective embrace.

Chol Homoed looms with the big question of

what to do with the children. Spend quality time reading stories to your kids about bitachon. For young children, the thin blue Machanayim books are great. For older children, stories about overcoming obstacles such as the Marcus Lehman's book are wonderful. Visiting friends and relatives is a good way of spending time together. If you live in Israel or close to Yerushalayim, touring holy sites such as the Old City and the Kotel with the children is a superb option. If you don't live in Israel, you may need to take them to a nature reserve or the botanical gardens or the zoo to keep them satisfied. Entertaining teenagers make take a little more thought. Prepare before Sukkot and

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plan how you will keep them busy and happy. Make sure whatever they do is appropriate and is in keeping with the extra kedusha inherent in Chol Hamoed. Sukkot is a time of love. Do everything you can to make your teenagers feel beloved and important. Give them freedom and let them choose what they

would like to do. If you don't feel you can trust them, you may need to go to places that may not interest you all that much to make sure they stay in line.

Whatever you do let this message flow through- This is special time together

because Hashem made it so. Let us be grateful to Him for protecting us through the year and bringing us to this point. Let us tap into the kedusha of the holiday and elevate our joy to simcha shel mitzvah

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.