

Succot, 5785, 2024:

The Succah and Yetziat Mitzrayim

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The *mitzvah* of dwelling in the *succah* appears quite straightforward, as the Rambam (1135-1204) states:

What is the *mitzvah* of dwelling in the *succah*? One should eat and drink and dwell in the *succah* for the entire seven-day period both at night and during the day in exactly the same manner that he dwells in his house during the other days of the year. Throughout the entire seven-day period, a person should treat his house as a temporary dwelling and his *succah* as his permanent dwelling. As it says in the verse: You shall dwell in *succot* for seven days (*Vayikra* 23:42). (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Succah* 6:5, translation my own)

The Rambam emphasizes the *ma'aseh hamitzvah* of *succah*, the actual manner in which the commandment should be performed. In contrast, the Tur (Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher, 1270-1340), focuses on its rationale:

“You shall dwell in *succot* for seven days...in order that you should know throughout the generations that I caused the Jewish people to dwell in *succot* when I led them out ... [from Egypt]” (*Vayikra* 23:42). The Torah demonstrates that the *mitzvah* of *succah* is contingent upon the Exodus from Egypt. So, too, in the case of many other *mitzvot*. This is so, since this is a matter that we saw with our eyes and heard with our ears and no one is able to deny it. It teaches us about the truth of the existence of the Creator, may He be exalted, and that He created everything according to His will. It also teaches us that He has the power, the dominion, and the ability, both in the upper and lower worlds, to do with them as He so desires... (Introduction to *Hilchot Succah*, translation my own)

The Tur underscores the conceptual link that obtains between the *mitzvah* of *succah* and essential principles of Jewish thought, such as the existence of the Creator and His omnipotence in both the Heavens and the earth. In so doing, he suffuses the act of sitting in the *succah* with notable theological significance.

The Bach (Rabbi Yoel Sirkes, 1551-1640) scales the Tur's analysis and reveals further levels of meaning. He asserts that the Tur's core point is highlighting the indispensable role that *kavanah* plays in performing the *mitzvah* of *succah*, namely, viewing the *succah* as the symbol of *Yetziat Mitzraim*. The Bach elaborates on this point in his conclusion

The purpose of the *mitzvah* of *succah* is to remember *Yetziat Mitzraim*. This is accomplished through one's dwelling in a *succah* where the shade is greater than the sun. This, in turn, is a reminder of the Clouds of Glory that protected them ... through their wanderings in the desert.

In addition, the Bach asserts that the highest form of fulfilling this commandment requires us to carefully focus on the Torah's phrase, "... in order that you should know (*vaydu*) throughout the generations that I caused the Jewish people to dwell in *succot*." The Bach maintains that this "will enable one to fulfill the *mitzvah* in its most proper fashion (*k'tikunah*)." Therefore, for the Bach, if a person desires to fulfill the *mitzvah* of dwelling in the *succah* on its deepest level, he must have *kavanah* regarding two major points: this *mitzvah*'s inextricable link to *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, and Hashem's great kindness in allowing us to dwell in *succot* following the Exodus.

May Hashem soon fulfill the stirring words of our Friday night *tefilot* "And spread over us the *succah* of Your peace. Blessed are You Hashem, Who spreads the *succah* of peace upon us and upon all His people Israel and upon *Yerushalayim*." *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom and *Chag Sameach!*

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