A GUIDE TO THE Hoshanot Prayers

Hoshanot are the special prayers recited each day of Sukkot while holding the lulav and etrog. The name comes from the refrain of הושענא, meaning “please save.” The Mishnah (Sukkah 4:5) describes how on each day of Sukkot, the kohanim would lead the people in a circle around the miz-beach reciting הושענא and on the seventh day of Sukkot – Hoshanah Rabbah – they would circle seven times. The Midrash describes how we emulate this ceremony as a sign we have emerged victorious from our judgment on Yom Kippur, just five days earlier.

The hoshanot were composed by the great liturgical poet Rabbi Elazar HaKalir and are, for the most part, arranged according to the aleph-bet. Each day, one hoshanah is read with seven being read on Hoshanah Rabbah. Each hoshanah has its own theme. Unlike most prayers, the order of the hoshanah varies depending on what day of the week Sukkot begins. This year, since Sukkot begins on Shabbat, the order is as follows:

אומנֶה הָוֹשַׁעַת – This hoshanah is recited on Shabbat and its theme is Shabbat – the obligations to remember and to keep Shabbat, the 2,000-cubit Shabbat boundary, the special Shabbat food and clothes, two loaves of bread at each meal, and more. (On Shabbat, we do not carry a lulav and etrog or circle the bimah.)

לְמַעַן אֲמִיתָךְ – This hoshanah refers to G-d’s various ‘traits’ – truth, greatness, splendor, kindness, goodness, unity, power, etc. It also mentions His covenant and the Beit HaMikdash which, while not traits, are still relevant to the holiday.

אֶעֱרֹךְ שׁוּעִי – The theme of this hoshanah is that we should arrange our prayers in advance, rather than wait till times of trouble. This prayer references the recently-completed Yamim Noraim.

אֶבֶן שְׁתִיָּה – This hoshanah mentions Yerushalayim in general and the Beit HaMikdash in particular – the foundation stone, the threshing floor purchased for the land upon which to build the Beit HaMikdash, the trees imported from Lebanon to make panels, etc. Salem refers to the name of Yerushalayim until the times of Avraham Avinu, while Zion is the Temple Mount.
— Salvation is the theme here. It lauds Torah scholars, who master the secrets of the Torah and all the details of the law, and turn to G-d to beseech Him to redeem us.

— This *hoshanah* discusses G-d as our savior – only He has the ability to provide us with sufficient crops and rain.

There is an additional *hoshanah* not recited during Sukkot this year, but traditionally read on Hoshanah Rabbah:

— The nation of Israel, is compared to a wall, the sun, a palm tree, and more.

On Hoshanah Rabbah, we recite seven *hoshanot*, including:

- לְמַעְנֵי אֱמִיתָךְ
- אֵבֶן שְׁתִיָּה
- אָדֽוֹן הַמּוֹשִֽׁיעַ
- and
- אֹֽם אֲנִֽי חוֹמָֽה

In addition, there are three special *hoshanot* for Hoshanah Rabbah:

— Man is compared to various things, ranging from a tapestry to animals.

— This discusses the curses Adam brought upon the world through his sin.

— The deeds of our righteous forebears with a unifying theme of fire. ■