



Sukkot on Shabbat in the Kovno Ghetto

This year, the first day of Sukkot falls on Shabbat, as it did in 1943. In his Holocaust responsa, Rabbi Ephraim Oshri tells the following story: Sukkot was approaching and no-one in the ghetto had *arba minim*. Not only were they distraught but they were also afraid they may never shake a *lulav* again.

Suddenly, a Jew appeared with a set of *arba minim*! He had come from Vilna on business but the Germans would not allow him to stay for the second day. He had to return to Vilna immediately after Shabbat. The Jews in the ghetto were worried they'd miss out on the *mitzvah* so they asked Rabbi Oshri if in those circumstances they could bench *lulav* on Shabbat.

The Gemara (Sukkah 42b) says that although the Torah indicates we should take the *arba minim* even when the first *yom tov* falls on Shabbat, Chazal decreed not to, in case a person may carry his *arba minim* four *amot* in the public domain, which of course is forbidden on Shabbat.

It seems the Sages' intention was to make sure that when Yom Tov falls on Shabbat, we don't entirely forget the Shabbat part.¹

So did Chazal completely uproot this *mitzvah* or did they perhaps only forbid it, in which case if one was to take the *arba minim* on Shabbat one would still be fulfilling a *mitzvah*? Another question is whether taking the *lulav* is forbidden because it is a *mitzvah* that comes from an *aveira* (i.e. overriding the words of the Sages). Rav Oshri discusses this too and writes that this

concept is perhaps not applicable when the *aveira* is *mideRabbanan*.

He adds: "The decree was to prevent someone carrying in a public area. Usually, even if there is an *eruv*, we are still concerned someone may step outside the boundaries of the *eruv*. However, in the Kovno Ghetto, there was no chance of that because it was hermetically sealed – "No-one was allowed in or out and it was bordered by an electric barbed wire fence guarded by German soldiers."

Perhaps in this context, when there is no chance of carrying something in a public domain, there is no rabbinic prohibition of taking the *arba minim*, and if the *mitzvah* was not uprooted, one would be able to take them.

Although Rav Oshri cited various arguments permitting taking *arba minim* on Shabbat, he didn't rule in favor of any particular position:

"I did not want to rule in this matter – neither prohibit nor allow, and since I did not rule it was forbidden, they understood themselves that one who does bench *lulav* will not lose out."

He then relates that many Jews did indeed make the *beracha* over the *arba minim* and even said "*Shechechyanu*." He adds that Reb Feivel Zissman ז"ל said he would observe the *mitzvah* without asking any questions: "I am ready to accept *Gehinnom* for observing this *mitzvah*, because all my life I spent a fortune on buying beautiful *etrogim*, and now – perhaps before my death – I know that observing this *mitzvah* will be a merit in my favor on the Day of Judgement."

At the same time, the *Gadol HaDor*, Rabbi Avraham DovBer Kahana-Shapira, was also in the ghetto. He was sick and in no state to respond to such a question in real time. However, he felt better during the holiday and Rav Oshri asked him what he would have responded. He replied, "Chazal did not talk about a reality in which people are imprisoned and in perpetual fear of their lives."

This year, we will also be celebrating Sukkot on Shabbat and we have the fortune to be free people in our own Land. Yes, we are experiencing a pandemic but that pales in the face of everything we have suffered throughout our history.

We pray the pandemic ends soon, that the world will be a better and purer place, and that *B'Ezrat Hashem* we ourselves will be able to do good deeds, sit in the *sukkah* and joyously take the *arba minim*, relishing all the good G-d has given us and using that good to make a difference to the world around us.

¹ See more on this in my book "Purim – *Halachah Mimkora*," p.353.

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The Universality of the Festival of Sukkot

In Zecharia's prophecy (14), he describes a day when the Kingship of *Hashem* is revealed to the entire world. As a result, there is great turmoil in the world: G-d wages war against the nations, there is a great earthquake, a spring bursts forth from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea and there is a total eclipse of the celestial luminaries. The end result of this tremendous upheaval is, "And G-d shall become King over all the earth; on that day the L-rd shall be one, and His name one" (14:9). One of the expressions of G-d's Kingship in the world is that all the nations of the world will also acknowledge and accept Him and they will all come to worship Him in Jerusalem.

"And it will come to pass, that everyone who is left of the nations who came up against Jerusalem, will go up every year to prostrate themselves to the King, the L-rd of Hosts, and to celebrate the festival of Sukkot" (14:16). Zecharia specifically focuses on the festival of Sukkot as the time when the nations will come to worship G-d. Why?

The Malbim states that "The Downfall of Gog will be on the festival of Sukkot, and they shall all go up to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival, as a commemoration of the miracle that occurred on that day."

According to this, it is precisely the great downfall of the gentiles/enemies of Israel in war that will bring those who are left to the understanding that G-d is King. Therefore, they must celebrate on that very day they come to this understanding and revelation. However, it would seem there is a deeper meaning

to the celebration of Sukkot, beyond commemorating the date of the war.

At the inauguration of the First Beit HaMikdash, on Sukkot, Shlomo designated it as a place of prayer for *all* of the nations, not just *Am Yisrael* (Melachim I 8:41-43). It appears it is no coincidence that both Shlomo and Zecharia designated the Beit HaMikdash for a universal purpose, which specifically revolves around the festival of Sukkot.

It is interesting to note that the *mitzvot* connected to Sukkot do possess a universal element and meaning:

The Four Species represent the prayer for rain, which is a basic, existential need for the entire world, not only for *Am Yisrael*.

The *korbanot* of the holiday are different from all the other festivals. On Sukkot, there are a total of 70 offerings, symbolizing the 70 nations of the world. As the Talmud states (Sukkah 55b): "Rabbi Elazar said: These 70 bulls to what do they correspond? They correspond to the 70 nations." Rashi explains there: "There are 70 bulls corresponding to the 70 nations of the world in order to atone for them, so that rain will fall in the whole world, for we are judged regarding rainfall on the festival of Sukkot."

Sitting in the *sukkah* symbolizes impermanence, vulnerability, and simplicity, and thus can unite all human beings around one common denominator. During most of the year, one is locked up in one's own home, disconnected from others and wrapped up in one's own definitions, impressions and sense of security. The walls, partitions,

defenses, definitions and stereotypes, prevent people from connecting with one another. So too, the feelings of haughtiness and abundance obstruct G-d's Kingship in the world and cause divisiveness among people.

On Sukkot, everyone goes outside, and all are equal in their humble dwelling. As such, everyone can feel G-d's Providence, and a sense of equality with their fellow. It is precisely in this reality that people are able to make room for one another in their hearts, and for G-d's presence among them. Humility, simplicity, vulnerability and the feeling of impermanence allow people to connect, as well as allowing for G-d's Kingship to be felt.

The festival of Sukkot is a holiday when we pray for all of the world's existential needs. It is a time we all unite under the banner of humility and simplicity, a time we realize just how small we are compared to the Creator of the Universe. Sukkot is a festival in which it becomes possible for everyone on earth to unite in serving G-d.

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