

The Lulav Bundle Rectifies the Three Levels of Torah Not L'shmah The Perfect Esrog Corresponds to Torah L'shmah

In honor of Chag HaSuccos, which approaches auspiciously, it is fitting to examine the mitzvah of taking the four species, “arba’as haminim”: “esrog,” “lulav,” “hadas,” and “aravah.” This is detailed in the Torah in parshas Emor (Vayikra 26, 40): “ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון פרי עץ הדר כפות—**you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a tree of splendor, fronds of date palms, and branches of a cordlike tree, and brook willows; and you shall rejoice before Hashem, your G-d, for a seven-day period.**

The Zohar hakadosh in the Raiya Mehemna (Ki Seitzei 253a) and the Tikunei Zohar (Tikun 13, 29a) find an allusion to the “arba’as haminim” in HKB”H’s words of praise regarding Knesses Yisrael (Shir HaShirim 7, 9): “**אמרתי אעלה בתמר—I boast on high that your deeds cause Me to ascend on your palm tree.**” They note that the word **אעלה** (meaning: I will ascend) is an abbreviation for: **א'תרוג ע'רבה ל'ולב ה'דס**. Thus, the passuk states that HKB”H is proud and glorified by the fact that Yisrael bring the “arba’as haminim” on Chag HaSuccos; this deed causes Him to ascend, so to speak.

They Should All Be Tied Together in One Bundle and Atone for One Another

We can explain why these four species specifically cause HKB”H to ascend, based on Chazal’s revelation in the following Midrash (V.R. 30, 12):

“פרי עץ הדר אלו ישראל, מה אתרוג זה יש בו טעם ויש בו ריח, כך ישראל יש בהם בני אדם שיש בהם תורה ויש בהם מעשים טובים. כפות תמרין אלו ישראל, מה התמרה הזו יש בו טעם ואין בו ריח, כך הם ישראל יש בהם שיש בהם תורה ואין בהם מעשים טובים. וענף עץ עבות אלו ישראל, מה הדס יש בו ריח ואין בו טעם, כך ישראל יש בהם שיש בהם מעשים טובים ואין בהם תורה. וערבי נחל אלו ישראל, מה ערבה זו אין בה טעם ואין בה ריח, כך הם ישראל יש בהם בני אדם שאין בהם לא תורה ולא מעשים טובים.”

ומה הקב”ה עושה להם, לאבדן אי אפשר, אלא אמר הקב”ה, יוקשרו כולם אגודה אחת והן מכפרין אלו על אלו. ואם עשיתם כך, אותה שעה אני מתעלה, הדא הוא דכתיב (עמוס ט-ו) הבונה בשמים מעלותיו, ואימתי הוא מתעלה, כשהן עשויין אגודה אחת, שנאמר (שם) ואגודתו על ארץ יסדה, לפיכך משה מזהיר לישראל, ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון.”

The “pri eitz hadar” (“fruit of splendor”) represents Yisrael; just as this “esrog” possesses taste and fragrance, so does Yisrael; they include individuals who possess both Torah and possess good deeds. “kapos temarim” (“fronds of date palms”) represent Yisrael; just as this date palm possesses taste but lacks fragrance, so does Yisrael; they include individuals who possess Torah but lack good deeds. And “anaf eitz Avos” (“branches of a cordlike tree”) represent Yisrael; just as the “hadas” possesses fragrance but lacks taste, so does Yisrael; they include individuals who possess good deeds but lack Torah. And “arvei nachal” (“brook willows”) represent Yisrael; just as this “aravah” lacks taste and lacks fragrance, so does Yisrael; they include individuals who lack Torah and lack good deeds.

What does HKB”H do to them? To eliminate them is not an option. Instead, HKB”H said, “Let them all be bound together in a single bundle and atone for one another. If you have done this, at that moment I will ascend,” as it is written: “Who built in the heavens His strata.” And when does He ascend? When they are formed into a single group, as it is states: “And His group He has founded on earth.” Therefore, Moshe instructs Yisrael: “You shall take for yourselves on the first day.”

Thus, we have an explicit statement that HKB”H ascends to the heavens when his children, Yisrael, join together as a unified group and atone for one another. This explains very nicely the interpretation in the Zohar hakadosh of the passuk: “אמרתי אעלה בתמר”—that HKB”H ascends in the merit of the four species which are represented by the word **אעלה**—which stands for: **א'תרוג ע'רבה ל'ולב ה'דס**.

Three Species in the Right Hand and the Esrog in the Left

Now, concerning the fulfillment of the mitzvah of the “arba’as haminim” on Succos, it is worth exploring the fact that we bind three of the species together—the “lulav,” the “hadasim” and the “aravos”—while the “esrog” remains by itself. The “lulav” with the other two species bound to it are held in the right hand, while the “esrog” is held in the left hand. When the species are taken and shook, they are brought together. This is how the halachah is stated in the Tur and in the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 651, 1): **מצות ד' מינים, שיטול כל אחד לולב אחד וב' ערבות וג' הדסים, ומצוה לאגדם בקשר**—**the mitzvah of the four species requires that every individual take one “lulav,” and two “aravos,” and three “hadasim.” The mitzvah is fulfilled by binding them with a complete tie—in other words, two ties, one on top of the other for aesthetic purposes.**

The source for this practice stems from the dispute presented by the Gemara (Succah 33a) between Rabbi Yehudah and the Rabbis: **תניא לולב בין אגוד בין שאינו אגוד כשר, רבי יהודה אומר אגוד כשר, ורבי יוחנן אומר כשר—it was taught in a Baraisa: The “lulav” (and its related species) whether bound together or not is valid; Rabbi Yehudah says: When bundled it is valid; when not bundled, it is invalid.** The Gemara concludes that even according to the Rabbis (the first opinion in the Baraita, which is stated anonymously)—and the halachah accords with their point-of-view—the preferred way to perform the mitzvah is by binding the species together, in keeping with the notion of (Shemos 15, 2): **“זה אלי ואנוהו”—This is my G-d and I shall beautify Him!**

It is also stated as halachah (ibid. 2): **“יטול האגודה בידו הימנית, ראשיהם למעלה ועיקריהם למטה, והאתרוג בשמאלית”—one should take the bundle in one’s right hand--their heads upwards and their stems downwards—and the “esrog” in the left.** The source for this halachah is the Gemara (Succah 37b): **אמר רבה—לולב בימין ואתרוג בשמאל, מאי טעמא, הני תלתא מצות והאי חדא מצוה—Rabbah said: the “lulav” in the right and the “esrog” in the left. What is the reason? This one constitutes three mitzvos, while this one is just one mitzvah.** In other words, the “lulav” bundle includes three species and therefore three separate mitzvos—“lulav,” “hadas,” and “aravah”; the “esrog,” on the other hand, is only one mitzvah. Hence, we should endeavor to explain the rationale behind this practice. Why do we bind the three species together and hold them in one hand while leaving the “esrog” by itself in the other hand? Yet, when we proceed to perform the mitzvah we hold them together.

As to why the “esrog” remains alone and is not bundled together with the other three species can be explained very nicely based on what we learned in the Midrash. The “esrog” represents the total tzaddik, who also engages in Torah-study and performs good deeds. In contrast, the “lulav” represents a Jew who engages in Torah-study but lacks good deeds; the “hadas” represents a Jew who performs good deeds but does not engage in Torah-study; and then there is the “aravah,” representing a Jew who lacks both Torah and good deeds.

Now, HKB”H most certainly would like to unite the “arba’as haminim”—representing all four categories of Jews—into a single bundle; so that they can join together and atone for one another. Nevertheless, it is essential that the multitudes of Yisrael—represented by the three bundled species—hold the tzaddik in special esteem apart from the masses. This notion is expressed in the Mishnah (Avos 2, 10): **והוי מתחמם כנגד אורן—של חכמים, והוי זהיר בגחלתן שלא תכוה, שנשיכתן נשיכת שועל, ועקיצתן עקיצת עקרב—be warmed by the fire of the sages but beware of their glowing coals lest you be burned, for their bite is the bite of the fox, their sting the sting of a scorpion, and their hiss is the hiss of the serpent, and all their words are like coals of fire.**

Thus, we find it stated explicitly that although we are required to draw near to the sages in order to draw from their illumination, we must also be wary not to draw too near out of respect; we must be wary not to show them any disrespect and not to be burned by their fire. For this reason, the “esrog” stands apart and is only united with the other species when the “arba’as haminim” are taken for the sake of the mitzvah. Notwithstanding, with G-d’s help and blessing, we shall present a novel approach in honor of the upcoming, auspicious Chag HaSuccos.

The Four Species Correspond to Four Levels of Those Who Engage in Torah Study Represented by the Symbol “אגד”

Let us begin to illuminate the subject based on a precious introduction from the immaculate teachings of the Maharsha. He comments on the following Gemara (Nedarim 62a): **עשה דברים לשם פעלם, ודבר בהם לשמם, אל תעשם עטרה להתגדל בהם, ואל תעשם קורדום להיות עודר בו—fulfill the words of the Torah for the sake of their Maker, and speak these words for their own sake. Do not make them into a crown in order to be glorified through them, and do not make them a spade to dig with.** Regarding this statement, the Maharsha writes in Chiddushei

Aggados that in the entire aleph-Beis there are only four letters whose names contain the letter “lamed.” As we know, the letter “lamed” connotes “limud” (לימוד)—learning and teaching. The name of each of these letters contains the letter “lamed” related to the learning and study of Torah; however, the first three letters-- אֵלֶּף (“aleph”), גִּמֵּל (“gimel”) and דָּלֶת (“dalet”)—represent the three levels of those who engage in Torah-study not for its own sake, not with pure intentions—“lo l’shmah.”

How so? The letter אֵלֶּף is related to the word “אלוף” (master; leader) and alludes to a person who studies Torah for the sake of honor and respect—so that he will be called Rabbi and Master. The letter גִּמֵּל is related to the word “גמול” (reward; benefit) and alludes to a person who studies Torah so that he will reap benefits and reward in Olam HaBa. The letter דָּלֶת is related to the word “דלות” (poverty) and alludes to a person who studies Torah, because he is poor; he studies Torah for the sake of his livelihood, by teaching Torah to others. The letter לָמַד related to the word “לימוד”, however, alludes to a person who engages in Torah-study l’shmah—solely for the sake of Hashem, without any ulterior motives.

It appears that we can contribute a delightful tidbit to the Maharsha’s lofty idea. Besides the simple fact that the letter “lamed” is the first letter in the word “l’shmah” (לִשְׁמָה), why, in fact, does the letter “lamed” allude to Torah l’shmah? The Shela hakadosh writes in the name of the Ramak’s Pardes Rimonim (21, 1) that the letter “lamed” is constructed of the letter “chaf” with a “vav” on top. These two letters--כּוּ (26)—are the numerical equivalent of the name Havaya.

Furthermore, when we examine the letters of the aleph-Beis, we find that the letter “lamed” is taller than all of the other letters. The part of the “lamed” that extends above the written line is in the form of a finger pointing upward towards HKB”H. This explains very nicely why the letter “lamed” alludes to one who studies Torah l’shmah, for the sake of Hashem—Who is alluded to by the letter “lamed.”

Based on this notion, let us suggest a nice allusion in the following words spoken by Moshe Rabeinu to Yisrael (Devarim 4, 14): “וְאוֹתֵי צוּה ה' בַּעַת הַהִיא לְלַמֵּד אֶתְכֶם”—**Hashem commanded me at that time to teach you.** The passuk specifically employs the term “ללמד”, indicating that they are being instructed to engage in the type of Torah-study signified by the letter “lamed”—Torah l’shmah. This provides us with a very nice interpretation of the words of the Targum: “לאלפא יתכון”—to

rectify the letter “aleph,” alluding to Torah-study not l’shmah but rather for the sake of “kavod.”

The Four Species on Chag HaSuccos Correspond to the Four Letters אגדל

Accepting the challenge, let us propose a novel idea. The “arba’as haminim” which HKB”H commanded us to bring on Chag HaSuccos represent the four levels of those who engage in Torah-study. The “esrog,” possessing both taste and smell, alludes to the complete Jew—who engages in Torah-study l’shmah, solely for the sake of Hashem. As a result of his devotion, the Torah ascends heavenward to Hashem, fulfilling the notion of (Tehillim 108, 5): “כִּי גָדוֹל מֵעַל שָׁמַיִם חֶסֶדְךָ”—**for Your “chesed” is great beyond the heavens.**

Let us add a nice allusion based on an idea presented by the Panim Yafos (Vayikra 23, 40); he writes that the word אֶתְרָג is an acronym for (Tehillim 36, 12): “אֵל תְּבוֹאֲנִי רַגְלִי גָאוֹה”—**let not the foot of arrogance overcome me.** This is an apt description of the complete Jew, who engages in Torah-study l’shmah; he nullifies himself totally for the “kavod” of Hashem and His Torah. Therefore, he stands apart from the other three species.

On the other hand, the other three species represent the three levels of those who engage in Torah-study not l’shmah. The lulav is the tallest and extends upwards above the other species; it alludes to those represented by the letter “gimel,” engaging in Torah-study for the sake of reward in the hereafter. The “hadas,” possessing smell but lacking taste alludes to those represented by the letter “dalet,” engaging in Torah-study for the sake of their livelihood. The “aravah,” lacking both the qualities of taste and smell, alludes to those represented by the letter “aleph,” engaging in Torah-study for the sake of “kavod”; they are the worst of all—studying Torah so that they will be called Master (“aluf”) or Rabbi.

It is for this reason that HKB”H commanded us to unite the four species when taking them to perform the mitzvah. As the Midrash explains: “אָמַר הַקֹּבֶה יוֹקְשֵׁרוֹ כּוֹלֵם אֲגוּדָה אַחַת וְהָן מִכְפְּרִין אֱלֹהֵי עַל”—HKB”H instructed Yisrael to bind them together so that the “esrog”—representing the complete Jew, who engages in Torah-study l’shmah—will come and with his Torah will atone for the other three species who engage in Torah-study not l’shmah.

It appears that we can provide support for this idea from that which is written (Devarim 16, 13): “חַג הַסּוּכוֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים”—

“you shall celebrate Chag HaSuccos for seven days, when you gather in from your threshing floor and from your wine pit.” The Gemara (Succah 12a) provides the following elucidation: **“בכסולת גורן ויקב הכתוב מדבר”**—**the passuk is referring to the refuse of the threshing floor and wine pit.** The Tiferes Shlomo (Succos) explains the implication of the Gemara’s statement. On Chag HaSuccos, there is a tikun for the Torah and mitzvos that Yisrael performed improperly or inadequately, represented by the **“refuse of the threshing floor and wine pit.”** On Succos, they are elevated to the realm of kedushah. This concludes his explanation. Thus, we learn that all the categories of Torah studied not l’shmah—represented by the **“refuse of the threshing floor and wine pit”**—have a tikun on Chag HaSuccos.

This enlightens us and allows us to rejoice at having gained a better understanding of the Rabbis’ point-of-view—with which the halachah accords—presented in the Gemara (Succah 33b): **“לולב אין צריך אגד”**—the mitzvah is fulfilled even if the three species are not bundled together. Nevertheless, the preferred method of performing the mitzvah is to bundle them together, for the sake of beautification: **“זה אלי ואנוהו”**. For, based on what we have discussed, we can suggest that the three letters of the word **אגד** (bundle), allude to the three categories of those who engage in Torah-study not l’shmah. The “aleph” represents those who learn for “kavod,” the “gimel” those who learn for reward in Olam HaBa, and the “dalet” those who learn for their livelihood in Olam HaZeh.

Now, according to halachah, it is not absolutely necessary to bind them together to form an **אגד** (bundle). For, we know from the Gemara (Pesachim 50b): **“לעולם יעסוק בתורה ומצוות אף על פי שלא”**—a person should always engage in the study of Torah and the performance of mitzvos, even if his actions are not purely motivated—not l’shmah; because from these activities that are not purely motivated, he will eventually come to learn Torah and perform mitzvos for its own sake, with the purest of intentions—l’shmah. Thus, we see that even Torah-study not l’shmah is valuable in Hashem’s eyes. Nevertheless, it is a mitzvah to bind the species together in order to rectify Torah-study not l’shmah, represented by the three letters **אגד**, thereby achieving the attribute of beautification: **“זה אלי ואנוהו”**. By uniting the other three species with the “esrog”—corresponding to the tzaddik, who learns Torah l’shmah—they all achieve the beautiful ideal of l’shmah.

How wonderfully this explains the requirement to wave the “arba’ah minim” in all four directions and up and down, as taught in the Gemara (Succah 37b): **“אמר רבי יוחנן, מוליך ומביא”**

“one -- למי שהארבע רוחות שלו, מעלה ומוריד למי שהשמים והארץ שלו” extends them to and fro for the sake of the One Whom the four directions are His; then one raises them up and lowers them down for the sake of the One Whom the heavens and the earth are His. Rashi explains that this protocol indicates that we are performing the mitzvah for His sake.

Let us explain. The purpose of taking “arba’as haminim” is to unite the three categories of those who study Torah not l’shmah with the category of those who study Torah l’shmah—thereby all four categories are elevated to the status of l’shmah. Therefore, it is necessary to wave the four species in all six directions to indicate that we yearn to rectify everything for the sake of Hashem.

“Simchas Beis HaShoeivah” for the Water Libation

This incredible concept ties in magnificently with the unique celebration associated with Chag HaSuccos: **שמחת** “**Simchas Beis HaShoeivah**”—the celebration of drawing water to be poured on the mizbeiach on Chag HaSuccos. Throughout the entire year, every korban-olah and korban-shelamim was accompanied by a wine-libation—a “minchas nesachim.” On Succos, in addition to the wine, water was also poured on the mizbeiach. This water-libation was not performed for all of the korbanos but only for the morning “tamid” offering. This is stated explicitly in the Gemara (Yoma 26b): **“אין מנסכין מים בחג אלא בתמיד של שחר”**.

Regarding the tremendous joy associated with the celebration of “Simchas Beis HaShoeivah,” our blessed sages report in the Mishnah (Succah 51a):

“מי שלא ראה שמחת בית השואבה לא ראה שמחה מימיו, במוצאי יום טוב הראשון של חג ירדו לעזרת נשים ומתקנין שם תיקון גדול [בגמרא (שם): מפרש שתיקנו שיהיו הנשים יושבות מלמעלה ואנשים מלמטה]. מנורות של זהב היו שם וארבעה ספלים של זהב בראשיהם, וארבעה סולמות לכל אחד ואחד, וארבעה ילדים מפרחי כהונה ובידיהם כדים של מאה ועשרים לוג שהן מטילין [שמן] לכל ספל וספל... ולא היה חצר בירושלים שאינה מאירה מאור בית השואבה.”

חסידים ואנשי מעשה היו מרקדין בפניהם באבוקות של אור שבידיהן, ואומרים לפניהם דברי שירות ותשבחות, והלויים בכינורות ובנגלים ובמצלותם ובחצוצרות ובכלי שיר בלא מספר, על חמש עשרה מעלות היורדות מעזרת ישראל לעזרת נשים, כנגד חמש עשרה שיר המעלות שבתהלים, שעליהן לויים עומדין בכלי שיר ואומרים שירה.”

Whoever did not see the “Simchas Beis HaShoeivah” never saw rejoicing in his life. At the conclusion of the first day of the “chag,” the kohanim and leviim went down to the “Ezras Nashim”

(Women's Courtyard), where they made an arrangement of great benefit. [They arranged for the women to sit above and the men to remain below.] There were golden menorahs there, and four golden bowls atop each of them. And there were four ladders for each menorah, and four youths from the young kohanim, and in their hands were pitchers containing a total of one hundred and twenty lugim of oil, which they poured into each bowl. . . There was not a courtyard in Yerushalayim that was not illuminated by the light of the Beis HaShoeivah (literally: Place of the Water Drawing).

Chassidim and men of good deeds would dance before them with flaming torches in their hands, and say before them words of songs and praises. And the leviim, with their harps, lyres, cymbals, trumpets and countless other musical instruments, stood on the fifteen steps that led down from the "Ezras Yisrael" to the "Ezras Nashim," which corresponded to the fifteen "Shir HaMa'alos" in Tehillim. For on them the leviim would stand with their musical instruments and utter song.

The joy and spectacle of this celebration were unparalleled, in any other place and at any other time of the year. We can explain the reason for this unique celebration based on the passuk (Vayikra 2, 13): "וכל קרבן מנחתך במלח תמלח ולא תשבית מלח ברית" "וכל קרבן מנחתך במלח תמלח ולא תשבית מלח ברית" --you shall salt your every korban minchah with salt; you may not discontinue the salt of your G-d's covenant from upon your korban minchah; on all your korbanos shall you offer salt. Rashi comments: "מלח" ברית - שהברית כרותה למלח מששת ימי בראשית, שהובטחו המים התחתונים ברית - שהברית כרותה למלח מששת ימי בראשית, שהובטחו המים התחתונים "ליקרב במזבח במלח וניסוך המים בחג" --for a covenant has been made with salt since the six days of creation; for the lower waters were promised to be offered on the altar in the form of salt and in the form of water libations on Succos. The source for this explanation is the Midrash cited by Rabeinu Bachaye:

"וכן אמרו במדרש מים התחתונים נקראו מים בוכים, ולמה נקראו מים בוכים, כי בשעה שחלק הקב"ה את המים נתן אלו למעלה ואלו למטה, התחילו מים התחתונים בוכים... אמרו אוי לנו שלא זכינו לעלות למעלה להיות קרובים ליוצרנו... אמר להם הקב"ה, הואיל ולכבודי עשיתן כל כך, אין להן רשות למים העליונים לומר שירה עד שיטלו רשות מכם... ולא עוד אלא שעתידין אתם ליקרב על גבי המזבח במלח וניסוך המים".

The Midrash states that the lower waters are referred to as "crying waters." For, when HKB"H divided the waters, some were placed above and some were placed below. The lower waters began to cry. They lamented the fact that they did not

merit to remain above in close proximity to the Creator. In an attempt to appease them, HKB"H told them that: (a) the upper waters are not permitted to utter their song until they first obtain permission from the lower waters and furthermore (b) they, the lower waters, were destined to be offered on the altar in the form of salt and in the form of water libations—according to them distinction and honor.

We can now appreciate the tremendous simchah associated with the water-libation on Chag HaSuccos. For, this ceremony constitutes a tikun and consolation for the lower waters that cried, lamenting the fact that they were distanced from Hashem. By pouring them on the mizbeiach, they are able to draw nearer to Hashem; and their laments are transformed into joy and simchah. Therefore, we, too, participate in the simchah of the lower waters in order to learn a vital lesson from them. It behooves us to yearn to draw nearer to Hashem and to weep bitterly: "אוי לנו שלא זכינו לעלות למעלה להיות קרובים ליוצרנו"—woe unto us that we did not merit ascending heavenward to be closer to our Creator! By doing so, we will merit drawing nearer to Hashem just as the lower waters did. In truth, on Succos we draw nearer to Hashem due to the fact that HKB"H places us in the succah, in the shade of emunah, beneath the wings of the Shechinah.

This is why our blessed sages prove that we are obliged to rejoice in the "Simchas Beis HaShoeivah" from the passuk (Yeshayah 12, 3): "ושאבתם מים בששון ממעיני הישועה"—and you shall draw water joyfully from the springs of salvation. In other words, you should join in the delight and simchah of the lower waters at having drawn nearer to Hashem; so that you will learn to also lament the separation and distance from Hashem and to rejoice at the drawing nearer to Hashem.

The Lower Waters Are the Torah Not L'shmah that Remain Down Below

In truth, however, the crying of the lower waters deserves further examination. One of the principles of faith is that (Yeshayah 6, 3): "קדוש קדוש קדוש ה' צבאות מלא כל הארץ כבודו"—the glory of Hashem fills the entire universe. So, what is the basis of the lower waters' lament: "Woe unto us that we did not merit ascending heavenward to be closer to our Creator!"? Even down on earth, they are still in the presence of HKB"H. Furthermore, since it was HKB"H's decree that they remain down below, how dare they question the King's decision and request that He alter the order of creation?

It appears that we can explain the matter based on what we have learned in the following Gemara (Pesachim 50b): (רבא רמי, כתיב: (שם קח-ה) כי גדול מעל שמים חסדך, (תהלים נז-יא) כי גדול עד שמים חסדך, וכתיב (שם קח-ה) כי גדול מעל שמים חסדך, Rava pointed out a contradiction. It is written in one passuk: "For great until the heavens is Your kindness"; and it is written elsewhere: "For great above the heavens is Your kindness." How can this be? The second passuk speaks of those who perform a mitzvah "I'shmah"; and the first passuk speaks of those who perform a mitzvah not "I'shmah." Rashi explains: "עושים לשמה מעל שמים, -- those who perform 'I'shmah' are rewarded above the heavens, while those who perform not 'I'shmah' are only rewarded until the heavens; for, he performed a mitzvah nevertheless.

In Tzemach Hashem LaTzvi (Ki Tisa), he explains Rava's meaning based on a statement from the Tikunei Zohar (Tikun 10, 25b): "אורייתא בלא דחילו ורחימו לא פרחת לעילא" —without "yirah" and "ahavah" one's Torah cannot ascend to the heavens. For, when a person engages in Torah-study and the performance of mitzvos not "I'shmah," the two wings—"yirah" and "ahavah"—are absent; hence, the person's Torah and mitzvos remain down below unable to ascend to the heavens. Therefore, "midah k'neged midah" —measure for measure — Hashem's kindness is only manifested "until the heavens." On the other hand, if a person engages in Torah-study "I'shmah," solely for the sake of Hashem, he is filled with "yirah" and "ahavah." In this case, his Torah ascends all the way to the heavens before Hashem. This, too, is "midah k'neged midah"; Hashem's great kindness is manifested "above the heavens."

A similar explanation appears in the sefer Masok MiDvash, authored by Rabbi Yitzchak Pirchi, z"l. He applies this idea to explain the significance of the passuk (Bereishis 1, 6): "ויאמר אלקים: יהי רקיע בתוך המים ויהי מבדיל בין מים למים, ויעש אלקים את הרקיע ויבדל בין המים אשר מתחת לרקיע ובין המים אשר מעל לרקיע ויהי כן" — G-d said, "Let there be a firmament between the waters, and let it separate between water and water." G-d made the firmament, and He separated between the waters which were beneath the firmament and the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. He refers to the elucidation in the Gemara (B.K. 17a): "אין מים אלא תורה, שנאמר (ישעיה נה-א) הוי כל צמא לכו למים" — there is no water ("mayim") other than Torah, as it states: "Ho, everyone who is thirsty, go to the water."

This then is the interpretation of the passuk: "ויאמר אלקים: יהי רקיע בתוך המים ויהי מבדיל בין מים למים" —in other words, HKB"H created the "rakia" (firmament) to act as a dividing wall, between two types of water—namely Torah-study "I'shmah" and Torah-study not "I'shmah." "ויעש אלקים את הרקיע ויבדל בין המים אשר מתחת לרקיע" —the waters beneath the "rakia" represent Torah not "I'shmah"; it remains beneath the heavens. "ובין המים אשר מעל לרקיע" —the waters above the "rakia" represent Torah "I'shmah"; it ascends higher and higher until it reaches Hashem.

We can now shed some light on the deeper significance of the weeping of the lower waters at having been separated and distanced from Hashem. For, the lower waters represent the portions of the Torah that descended to Yisrael from the heavens at the time of Matan Torah, so that they would engage in Torah-study I'shmah. By doing so, the Torah would return to the heavens, to the presence of Hashem, the Giver of the Torah. However, not every person is on that level—able to engage in Torah-study I'shmah. Consequently, all the portions of the Torah that were learned not I'shmah, and remained below in Olam HaZeh, fall into the category of: "כי גדול עד שמים חסדך" —for great until the heavens is Your kindness. They scream out and lament: "Woe unto us that we did not merit ascending heavenward to be closer to our Creator!"

During the month of Elul and the ten days of teshuvah extending from Rosh HaShanah to Yom HaKippurim, Yisrael have been engrossed in the process of teshuvah and have merited atonement and purification, in keeping with the passuk (Vayikra 16, 30): "כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם לטהר אתכם מכל חטאותיכם" —for on this day, He shall provide atonement for you to purify you; from all of your sins before Hashem shall you be purified. Therefore, after Yisrael have returned to Hashem by performing wholehearted teshuvah for all of their transgressions, HKB"H commanded us to sit inside the succah, in the shade of emunah, under the protective wings of the Shechinah, during the seven days of Chag HaSuccos. Additionally, He commanded us to pour water on the mizbeiach, alluding to the fact that on Chag HaSuccos there is a tikun for the lower waters—representing all of the portions of Torah, learned not I'shmah, which are now able to ascend to the heavens.

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