

We Sit in the Succah to Arouse the Chesed of Our Youth: "לכתך אחרי במדבר בארץ לא זרועה"

In honor of the festival of Succos, "the time of our rejoicing"—"זמן שמחתנו"—it is fitting that we delight in a revelation from the great Rabbi of Ropshitz, zy" a, in Zera Kodesh (Succos First Night). Avraham Avinu observed the mitzvah of succah. So, when he hosted the malachim, he fed them under the shade and protection of the succah. In that merit, HKB" H thwarted the malachim who protested the giving of the Torah to Yisrael. In other words, Yisrael were privileged to receive the Torah in the merit of the mitzvah of succah.

We learn this amazing fact from a teaching in the Midrash (B.R. 48, 10) related to Avraham's instructions to the three malachim (Bereishis 18, 4): "והשענו תחת העץ. אמר: הקב"ה לאברהם... אתה אמרת והשענו תחת העץ, חייך שאני פורע לבניך (תהלים קה-לט) פרש ענן למסך, הרי במדבר. בארץ מנין, (ויקרא כג-מב) בסוכות תשבו שבעת ימים. לעתיד לבוא מנין, (ישעיה ד-1) וסוכה תהיה לצל "Rest yourselves under the tree." HKB" H said to Avraham, "... you said, 'Rest yourselves under the tree'; I swear by your life that I will compensate your children for this good deed." This divine promise was fulfilled in the midbar in the form of the protective cloud cover. In the land, Bnei Yisrael sat in Succos during the seven days of the festival. Le'atid la'vo, we will luxuriate in the shade of the succah, as described by the prophet (Yeshayah 4, 6): "יסוכה"—and there will be a succah as a shade from heat in the daytime.

Chazal also teach us that when Moshe Rabeinu ascended to the heavens to receive the Torah on behalf of Yisrael, the ministering angels attempted to harm him. Once again, HKB" H deflected the claims of the malachim, because of the fact that Avraham Avinu had fed the malachim. This

is described in the Midrash (S.R. 28, 1) in relation to the following passuk regarding Matan Torah (Shemos 19, 3):

"ומשה עלה אל האלקים, הדא הוא דכתיב (תהלים סח-יט) עלית למרום שבית שבי... באותה שעה בקשו מלאכי השרת לפגוע במשה, עשה בו הקב"ה קלסטירין של פניו של משה דומה לאברהם, אמר להם הקב"ה, אי אתם מתביישין הימנו, לא זהו שירדתם אצלו ואכלתם בתוך ביתו."

"And Moshe ascended toward G-d": To protect Moshe, HKB" H made Moshe's countenance resemble that of Avraham. Then HKB" H asked the angels if they weren't ashamed to behave in this manner toward the one who had hosted them in his home and fed them so graciously.

Thus, we learn from the Midrash that Avraham Avinu observed the mitzvah of succah and that he fed the malachim under the cover of the succah instructing them: "והשענו תחת העץ." In that merit, HKB" H deflected the malachim by chastising them: "אי אתם מתביישין הימנו, לא זהו שירדתם אצלו—aren't you ashamed of yourselves? Didn't you go down to visit him and eat in his house? Then the Zera Kodesh adds a very nice allusion. If we take the first letters of Avraham's statement to the malachim—"ורחצו-והשענו תחת העץ"—they can be rearranged to spell "תורה"—teaching us that Yisrael received the Torah in the merit of sitting in the succah.

Notwithstanding, we must still endeavor to explain the connection between the mitzvah of succah and the receiving of the Torah. Furthermore, how was HKB" H able to silence the malachim with the argument that they had gone down to earth and eaten by Avraham? Was that sufficient reason for them to relent on receiving the precious, coveted Torah?

You Followed Me into the Wilderness into a Barren Land

We shall begin to shed some light on the subject by quoting the pesukim we recite on Rosh HaShanah in “zichronos.” HKB”H praises Yisrael for their trust in Him after the exodus. This is the foundation of the continued survival and existence of Yisrael and the Torah since their inception as a people and throughout the generations. It states in the Navi (Yirmiyah 2, 2): **“הלוך וקראת באזני ירושלים: לאמר, כה אמר ה' זכרתי לך חסד נעורייך אהבת כלולותיך, לכתך אחרי לאמר, כה אמר ה' זכרתי לך חסד נעורייך אהבת כלולותיך, לכתך אחרי—במדבר בארץ לא זרועה”** **Go and call out in the ears of Yerushalayim, saying: Thus said Hashem: I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me into the wilderness, into an unsown land. Rashi explains: What is meant by “the kindness of your youth”? You followed My agents, Moshe and Aharon; you departed a settled land and went into the midbar without food for the journey, because you trusted in Me.**

This remarkable feat is already alluded to by HKB”H in parshat Bo in relation to the exodus (Shemos 12, 39): **“ויאפו את הבצק אשר הוציאו ממצרים עוגות מצות כי לא חמץ כי גורשו ממצרים—ולא יכלו להתמהמה וגם צדה לא עשו להם—they baked the dough that they took out of Mitzrayim into cakes of matzot, for they could not be leavened, for they were driven from Mitzrayim and they could not delay; and also they had not made provisions for themselves. Rashi comments: This passuk extols the praise of Yisrael. They did not complain, “How can we go out into the midbar without provisions?” Instead, they believed and went. That is what is stated in the Navi: “I remembered for you the chesed of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me into the desert, into an unsown land.”**

If we explore the matter further, we find that the tremendous miracle of Krias Yam Suf was also performed on their behalf in the merit of this incredible trust. For, it is written (ibid. 14, 15): **“ויאמר ה' אל משה מה תצעק אלי דבר אל בני ישראל ויסעו—Hashem said to Moshe, “Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to Bnei Yisrael and let them journey!”** Regarding this event, we find the following elucidation in the Mechilta:

“כדאי היא האמונה שהאמינו בי שאקרע להם את הים, שלא אמרו למשה היאך אנו יוצאים במדבר, שאין בידינו מחיה לדרך, אלא האמינו והלכנו אחרי משה. עליהם מפורש בקבלה הלוך וקראת באזני ירושלים לאמר, זכרתי לך חסד נעורייך אהבת כלולותיך, לכתך אחרי במדבר בארץ לא זרועה.”

The trust that they placed in Me was sufficient reason for Me to split the sea. They did not complain to Moshe, “How can we go into the midbar without any provisions for the journey?” Instead, they believed and followed Moshe. This is described explicitly in the Navi . . .

This explains magnificently why our blessed sages use Krias Yam Suf as the paradigm for all salvations. For example, we have learned in the Gemara (Pesachim 118a): **“קשין מזונותיו של אדם כקריעת ים סוף, דכתיב (תהלים קלו-כה) גותן לחם—providing man’s sustenance is as difficult as Krias Yam Suf. For it is written, “He gives nourishment to all flesh” and near that passuk it states: “To the One Who divided the Yam Suf into segments.”** Similarly, we find a comparison drawn between Krias Yam Suf and finding a suitable mate (Sotah 2a): **“וקשין לזווגן כקריעת ים סוף”—it is as difficult to match them up as Krias Yam Suf.**

Let us provide an explanation based on what we have discussed. Just as the miracle of Krias Yam Suf was performed in the merit of simple “emunah”—faith and trust in HKB”H; so, too, if a person wishes to merit a decent livelihood and a suitable mate, he must demonstrate simple “emunah”—a willingness to follow HKB”H blindly into the barren wilderness. This holds true even if a person does not see the light at the end of the tunnel and all seems futile. Nevertheless, he should continue to believe wholeheartedly that HKB”H will provide him salvation just as He performed the incredible miracle of Krias Yam Suf on behalf of Yisrael.

In the Merit of Following HKB”H into the Midbar They Merited Receiving the Torah in the Midbar

Now, not only did Yisrael receive the Torah in the merit of following HKB”H blindly into the midbar without hesitation, but in this same merit, He also protected Yisrael on all of their journeys in the midbar from all of their enemies and from all sorts of harm. This fact is expressed in this week’s parsha, parshat Ha’azinu, as follows (Devarim 32, 10):

”ימצאהו בארץ מדבר ובתוהו ילל ישימון יסובכנהו יבוננהו יצרנהו כאישון
 “עינו—**He found him in a desert land, and in the wastes of a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He made him comprehending, He guarded him like the pupil of his eye.** Rashi elaborates on every detail mentioned in this passuk; it behooves every Jew to study his magnificent comments and review them carefully:

”ימצאהו בארץ מדבר”: **He found them faithful to Him in the land of the desert, for they accepted upon themselves His Torah, His sovereignty, and His yoke, which Yishmael and Eisav did not do, as it says: “And He shone forth to them from Seir; He appeared from Mount Paran.”**

”A land of parchedness and desolation,” a place of the howling of “tananim” and the screaming of “bnos yaanah.” There, too, they were drawn by faith, and they did not say to Moshe, “How can we go out to the deserts, a place of parchedness and desolation?” As it is said: “Your following Me in the midbar.”

”סובכנהו”: **There He encircled them and surrounded them with clouds; and He positioned them all around with tribal-divisions in four directions; and He encircled them with the bottom of the mountain, for He held it over them like a barrel.**

”יבוננהו”: **He made him comprehending there with Torah and with understanding.**

Let us endeavor to explain in greater depth the connection between Yisrael’s receiving the Torah and their following HKB”H in the midbar by focusing on what we learned in the Mishnah (Avos 4, 14): “הוי גולה למקום תורה”—**exile yourself to a place of Torah.** First, however, let us introduce a dispute portrayed in the Midrash between HKB”H and the ministering angels regarding the creation of man (B.R. 8, 5):

”אמר רבי סימון, בשעה שבא הקב”ה לבראות את אדם הראשון, נעשו מלאכי השרת כיתים כיתים וחבורות, מהם אומרים אל יברא ומהם אומרים יברא, הדא הוא דכתיב (תהלים פה- יא) חסד ואמת נפגשו צדק ושלוש נשקו. חסד אומר יברא שהוא גומל חסדים, ואמת אומר אל יברא שכולו שקרים, צדק אומר יברא שהוא עושה צדקות, שלום אומר אל יברא דכוליה קטטא [שכולו מריבות]. מה עשה הקב”ה, נטל אמת והשליכו לארץ, הדא הוא דכתיב (דניאל ח-יב) ותשלך אמת ארצה.”

When HKB”H decided to create the first man, Adam HaRishon, the ministering angels were not all in agreement with this decision. Conflicting groups felt that man should be created, while others felt that he should not be created. **Chesed** — Kindness--said that he should be created because of the acts of kindness he performs. **Emes** — Truth--said that he should not be created, arguing that he is full of lies. **Tzedek** — Righteousness--argued that he should be created, because of his righteous and charitable acts; while **Shalom** — Peace--felt that he should not be created, because he is extremely quarrelsome and confrontational. In response, HKB”H took Emes and cast him down to earth, as the passuk states (Daniel 8, 12): “ותשלך אמת ארצה” — **and Emes was thrown down to earth.**

The commentaries are baffled by this Midrash. Regarding the creation of man, HKB”H says (Bereishis 1, 26): “נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו”--**“Let us make man in our image, as our likeness.”** Rashi comments: של “ענוותנותו של” —הקב”ה למדנו מכאן... שיהא הגדול נמלך ונוטל רשות מן הקטן” —this episode demonstrates HKB”H’s degree of humility; we learn that the greater and more esteemed party should seek counsel and request permission from the lesser party. That being the case, why did HKB”H cast Emes down to earth? After all, she merely voiced her opinion regarding the question she was asked.

Emes Is the Torah that HKB”H Gave Yisrael in the Land

The matter can be reconciled very nicely based on what the Yifeh Toar writes on the Midrash. He explains why HKB”H threw Emes down to earth but not Shalom, who also argued that man should not be created. Now, we know that the Torah is associated with Emes. For instance, when a person is called up to the Torah, he recites a berachah containing the formula: “אשר נתן לנו תורת אמת”—**Who gave us the Torah of Emes.** A similar wording appears in the prayer “ונתן לנו תורת אמת”: ובא לציון

Now, the group of malachim representing Shalom felt that man should not be created, because he is quarrelsome and combative. They were implying that he is influenced by his internal yetzer. As a consequence, his physical body is always at odds with his spiritual, divine soul. It ultimately causes man to sin. So, what did HKB”H do? He took **Emes**

and cast it down to earth, thereby alluding to the fact that He was destined to give the Torah to Yisrael down on earth. By occupying themselves with Torah-study, they would be able to overcome the yetzer, as the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b) explains. HKB”H says: **“בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תכלין, ואם —“I have created the yetzer hara, and I have created Torah as its antidote. If you engage in Torah-study, you will not be delivered into its hand.”**

We can elaborate on this idea further by referring to the following Mishnah (Avos 2, 4): **“אל תדין את חברך עד שתגיע: --למקומו”** **do not judge your fellow until you have been in his position.** Therefore, when Emes—the Torah—alleged that man was not worthy of creation, HKB”H cast Emes down to earth. HKB”H wanted Emes to judge man based on his earthly circumstances—where he is haunted by the yetzer hara. There, Emes would better appreciate the trials and tribulations man has to contend with and comprehend why man deserved to be created. For, it is man’s sacred duty to battle the yetzer hara to the bitter end; and even if he fails, chas v’shalom, he can achieve tikun by means of teshuvah.

The Torah Went Down to Earth after HKB”H Who Rested His Shechinah on Earth

Let us add a fascinating point based on another Midrash. When HKB”H created the universe, He rested His Shechinah down on earth; however, after Adam HaRishon sinned with the Eitz HaDa’as, HKB”H removed His Shechinah. Here is an excerpt from the Midrash Tanchuma (Nasso 16):

“בשעה שברא הקב”ה את העולם נתאווה שיהא לו דירה בתחתונים כמו שיש בעליונים, ברא את האדם וצוה אותו ואמר לו (בראשית ב-טז) מכל עץ הגן אכול תאכל ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכל ממנו, ועבר על ציוויו, אמר ליה הקב”ה כך הייתי מתאווה שיהא לי דירה בתחתונים כמו שיש לי בעליונים, ודבר אחד צויתי אותך ולא שמרת אותו, מיד סילק הקב”ה שכינתו לרקיע הראשון.”

When HKB”H created the world, He desired to have a dwelling among the inhabitants down below just as He has among the inhabitants up above. He created man and commanded him not to eat from the Eitz HaDa’as Tov VaRa; man violated this single command. As a consequence, HKB”H immediately withdrew His Shechinah to the first firmament.

It is apparent from the Midrash that at the time of creation, HKB”H vacated His heavenly abode in order to establish a dwelling for His Shechinah down on earth. At that time, before Yisrael had received the Torah, earth was a virtual wasteland. The Midrash, expounding on a passuk in parshat Ha’azinu (Devarim 32, 10), describes the situation as follows (Bamidbar Rabbah 2, 6): **“... ימצאהו בארץ מדבר וגו’...: “מדבר היה העולם עד שלא יצאו ישראל ממצרים, ובתוהו ילל שימון, תוהו ולילה--the world was a wilderness until Yisrael left Mitzrayim; the world was a dark void until after the exodus.**

Now, let us introduce a famous statement from the Zohar hakadosh (Acharei 73a): **“ג’ דרגין אינון מתקשרין דא בדא, קוב”ה --אורייתא וישראל”** **three entities are interconnected—HKB”H, the Torah and Yisrael.** So, just as HKB”H went down to earth when it was still a virtual wasteland; so, too, did He cast Emes—the Torah—down to earth. He meant for the Torah to follow Him down into the barren wilderness.

Now, we can begin to appreciate why Bnei Yisrael were not given the Torah until they followed HKB”H into the unsown midbar. They were following the path of the Torah. Thus, all three vital components united in the midbar fulfilling the dictum (Kohelet 4, 12): **“והחוט המשולש לא במהרה ינתק”--and the three-ply cord will not be severed easily.**

The Mitzvah of Succah Is a Symbolic Act Instilling in Us the Proclivity to Follow HKB”H

I was struck by a wonderful idea! As we have learned, HKB”H dispatched the malachim to visit Avraham Avinu specifically while he was observing the mitzvah of succah. This constituted a preparatory step for Yisrael to receive the Torah instead of the malachim. The mitzvah of succah commemorates the fact that HKB”H sheltered Yisrael beneath the “ananei hakavod”--clouds of glory--in the midbar. This phenomenon reflected their elevated spiritual status—as indicated by the fact that they willingly followed HKB”H into the barren wilderness.

Therefore, HKB”H took them under the wings of the Shechinah and surrounded them with the “ananei hakavod” that guided them through the midbar, as it is written (Shemos 13, 21): **“וה’ הולך לפניהם יומם בעמוד ענן לנחותם הדרך”**

Hashem went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to have them led along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel day and night.

To commemorate this phenomenon, HKB”H gave us the mitzvah of succah; so that a person would sit in the shade of HKB”H permeated with “emunah.” Hence, the mitzvah of succah constitutes a symbolic gesture aimed at instilling in every Jew the amazing power demonstrated by Yisrael when they departed Mitzrayim. This power will enable us to follow HKB”H in the barren wilderness of Olam HaZeh throughout the year with simple, pure “emunah.”

This explains very nicely why our blessed sages instituted the celebration of **Simchas Torah** immediately after Chag HaSuccos. On this occasion, we rejoice with the Torah and everyone is called up to the Torah. For, only after fulfilling the mitzvah of succah—leaving the comfort and security of our homes to take refuge in HKB”H’s shadow—are we deemed worthy to receive the Torah. Through the symbolic gesture of dwelling in the succah, we merit serving Hashem on the exalted level of: **“לכתך אחרי במדבר בארץ לא זרועה”**. Then we rejoice with the Torah, who also followed HKB”H into the barren wilderness. Thus, we bind together as a three-ply cord: **“HKB”H--קוב”ה אורייתא וישראל”**, **the Torah and Yisrael.**

This explains very nicely why Avraham Avinu set the precedent of observing the mitzvah of succah. He paved the way for all of Yisrael to also observe the mitzvah of succah. In fact, it should be apparent that the people of Yisrael inherited the exalted trait of: **“לכתך אחרי במדבר בארץ לא זרועה”** from Avraham Avinu. He was subjected to ten ordeals. The first one was (Bereishis 12, 1): **“לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית ה”**—**“אביך אל הארץ אשר אראך”**—leaving the security and comfort of his home and birthplace to blindly follow Hashem.

The Torah attests to this blind obedience as follows (ibid. 4): **“וילך אברם כאשר דיבר אליו ה”**—**Avram went as Hashem had instructed him.** He displayed a simple, unquestioning

emunah in Hashem, following him to an unknown and uncertain destination. Subsequently, when there was a famine in the land, he was compelled to go down to Mitzrayim. Once again, he did not hesitate or question the word of HKB”H. He continued to believe wholeheartedly that HKB”H would fulfill His promise. Thus, he paved the way for all of Yisrael, as HKB”H promised him: **“ואעשך לגוי גדול”**—that they, too, would follow in his footsteps and follow HKB”H into the barren wilderness.

Precisely for this reason, it was fitting for Avraham Avinu to establish the precedent for the mitzvah of succah. As explained, this mitzvah was designed to instill in Yisrael the exalted “madreigah” of leaving one’s comfort zone to follow HKB”H into uncharted, seemingly precarious territory. In his merit, HKB”H promised to give the mitzvah of succah to all of Yisrael: **“אתה אמרת והשענו תחת העץ, חייך שאני פורע לבניך... בסוכות תשבו שבעת ימים”**—so that they, too, would be able to achieve this lofty “madreigah.”

We can now appreciate why HKB”H sent the malachim to Avraham on Chag HaSuccos. He wanted them to comprehend that the purpose of this mitzvah is to instill in Yisrael this amazing trait that they inherited from Avraham—to follow HKB”H without question or hesitation. Thus, they would comprehend the extent of Yisrael’s kedushah. Despite all of their trials and tribulations, they follow HKB”H into the barren wilderness of Olam HaZeh. Therefore, they are worthy of receiving the Torah, who also followed HKB”H into the barren wilderness.

This then was the message that HKB”H conveyed to the malachim: **“אי אתם מתביישין הימנו, לא זהו שירדתם אצלו ואכלתם בתוך ביתו”**. In other words, when you went down and ate by Avraham under the shade of the succah, you observed the incredible power that Avraham instilled in all future generations of Yisrael. Therefore, they deserve to receive the Torah. You, on the other hand, do not have to endure any such ordeals; you live in a pristine world of angels, where galus and the uncertainty of G-d’s presence do not exist. Why do you think that you deserve to receive the Torah?!

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