

Dvar Torah for Sukkot

Based on *Likutey Halakhot, Shabbat 7:53-62*

It's Not Over Yet

You may have thought that the *teshuvah* (repentance) process was over, since Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur have passed. Perhaps you thought you were one of those who missed the opportunity to embark on *teshuvah's* path and would have to wait for next Rosh Hashanah to roll around in order to get started. Perhaps you thought you did pretty well on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and could now retire to your sukah and "kick back" and relax.

It's not over yet. The *teshuvah* process is still in progress.

That's certainly good news. If you missed the first opportunity, you can start now. If your first attempt at *teshuvah* was successful, your second attempt can be even more successful. Three Sukkot-mitzvot guide us in this phase of the *teshuvah* process: living in the sukkah, waving the *arbah minim* (four species), and the Hoshanas (hosannas).

The Talmud (Sukkah 11b) teaches us that the sukkah represents the Clouds of Glory that surrounded and protected us during our sojourn in the desert following the exodus from Egypt. The Clouds not only protected us from the desert's physical ravages, but from the Amalekites, our arch-enemy. Amalek tried to attack us both physically and spiritually (*Exodus 17:8; Deuteronomy 25:18*). So we went into our bunker, the Clouds of Glory.

This reaction was not without precedent. After our patriarch Yaakov met with his brother, Amalek's grandfather, "Yaakov traveled to Sukkot" (*Genesis 33:17*). This trip to Sukkot was a ride to faith (*Zohar 1:172b*). Not all of us can (or are meant to) spend our lives in the *beit midrash* (Torah study hall). All of us, however, need faith, and we need that faith to infuse and permeate how we eat, drink and sleep.

In relation to the *arbah minim* the Zohar (1:221a) asks, "Who won the war?" and answers, "The one who is holding the weapons." Reb Noson expresses his surprise at both the question and the answer. See who is left standing and you'll know who won the war. Furthermore, the victor will have laid his weapons down - they are no longer necessary.

Reb Noson explains that ordinarily this is true. However, Amalek is such an intractable and implacable foe that our war against him *never* ends and can never be won - on our own. God Himself must fight on our behalf against Amalek and will do so till the very end (*Exodus 17:16*).

This doesn't exempt us from trying our best. So we pick up this portable garden, our "weapons," the *lulav, etrog, hadasim* and *aravot* (palm frond, citron, myrtle branches and willows), each of which represents one of the letters of God's name. We wave them East, West, North, South, and up and down, indicating that they and we are under God's caring eye, everywhere. We are going to be proactive in our performance of mitzvot.

Lastly, we have the Hoshanas - "Save [us] please!" The Hoshanas are a string of twenty-two brief (mostly six or seven words) cries for help. Each cry begins and ends with the words *hosha na*; the words

beginning the middle of the cry follow the order of the *alefbet*. The Hoshanas are associated with the *aravot* (willows). The *aravot* give no fruit and have no fragrance. They represent the "worst" Jews (those devoid of Torah and mitzvot) and the worst within ourselves.

The expression *hosha na* is related to Yehoshua (Joshua), the leading disciple of Moshe Rabbeinu (Moses our teacher). As great as Yehoshua was, as faithful and devoted as he was to Moshe Rabbeinu, when he went on the mission with the other spies (*Numbers 13*) his soul was in mortal danger, such that his teacher prayed for him, "May God save you!"

Certainly we, even if we've taken our first steps on the path of *teshuvah*, face many challenges. There is no doubt that we need to cry out from the depths of our heart, again and again, "Save us!"

It's not over yet.

agutn yomtov!
chag sameach!

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