

The Interface between Yom Kippur & Sukkot: Joy and Awe as Complementary Expressions of Avodat Hashem

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The period of teshuvah (repentance) and yirah (Divine fear and awe) ushered in by Rosh Hashanah appears to culminate dramatically at the blowing of the shofar upon the conclusion of neilah. Sukkot, which follows, seems to constitute a totally independent holiday, one whose orientation contrasts sharply with the yamim noraim. While Yom Kippur accentuates the imitation of angels (reflected by the minhag to stand much of the day and to minimize sleep etc.), self-abnegation (inui) and other expressions of Divine awe, Sukkot projects the theme of simhah (joy) and focuses on the human dimension of Divine service including eating and sleeping in the sukkah. The principle of תשובו כעין תדוררו that regulates much of Sukkah conduct attests to this emphasis.

However, an analysis of the contrast between Yom Kippur and Sukkot reveals a compelling link between the two holidays, one which undoubtedly reflects a profound reciprocal relationship between them. There seems to be an undeniable pattern of parallel albeit opposite expressions and anomalies that characterize the treatment of Yom Kippur and Sukkot, differentiating them from the other haggim. This can be illustrated by examining the pesukim in parshat Emor which delineate all of the festivals.

Both Yom Kippur and Sukkot are introduced by the exclusionary phrase of אך.

On the 10th day of the 7th month, it shall be a day of atonement.

Vayikra 23:27

אך בעשור לחדש השביעי הזה יום
הכיפורים הוא
ויקרא כג:כז

On the 15th day of the 7th month, when you are gathering the produce of the land, celebrate the Lord's holiday 7 days.

Vayikra 23:29

אך בחמשה עשר יום לחדש השביעי
באספכם את תבואת הארץ תחגו את
חג ה' שבעת ימים
ויקרא כג:לט

This usage binds the two holidays together and establishes each as sui generis vis a vis the rest of the holidays. While Rashi and the Ramban minimize the specific significance of this expression by narrowing its application, the Ibn Ezra and Seforno perceive this introduction as being broadly symptomatic of the unique character of these two holidays. Yom Kippur and Sukkot are set apart from the rest of kedushat ha-zeman by this qualifying phrase.

The term מקרא קודש, ubiquitous in parshat Emor to signify the various haggim, is applied unusually only with respect to both Yom Kippur and Sukkot. Generally, it signifies a generic notion of yom tov as manifest by the prohibition of issur melakhah to which it is linked. However, in the context of Yom Kippur (23:27), מקרא קודש is disconnected from issur melakhah, and, instead, is expressed by the singular features of ועניתם את נפשותיכם. In the second, more expansive rendition of Sukkot, in Emor (23:39), the phrase מקרא קודש is omitted altogether! The pattern reinforces the impression that neither Yom Kippur nor Sukkot are conventional or generic moadim. The two holidays, then, are further linked by parallel expressions of their respective singular character.

It is unusual for the Torah to explicate the reason for particular laws. And yet, the Torah does elaborate the background of two of the moadim: Yom Kippur and Sukkot.

No work shall be done on that day, for it is a day of atonement to atone for you before the Lord your God.
Vayikra 23:28

כל מלאכה לא תעשו בעצם היום הזה כי יום הכיפורים הוא לכפר עליכם לפני ה' אלוקיכם.
ויקרא כג:כח

So that the generations shall know that I placed Bnei Yisrael to dwell in booths, when I took them out of Egypt, I am the Lord your God.
Vayikra 23:43

למען ידעו דורותיכם כי בסוכות הושבתי את בני ישראל בהוציאני אותם מארץ מצרים אני ה' אלוקיכם.
ויקרא כג:מג

Furthermore, both of these unique festivals are depicted in the Torah as periods in which kelal yisrael stands in the Divine presence (23:28,40). Again, Yom Kippur and Sukkot are linked by their parallel anomalous treatment. The fact that these parallels also acknowledge the contrast between and the juxtaposition of the two holidays- Yom Kippur as a day of atonement and Sukkot as a day of joy - does not diminish the connection. However, it does deepen the mystery: what does the Torah intend to convey by its parallel-opposite presentation of these two moadim?

We may better illuminate the complex and intriguing relationship between Yom Kippur and Sukkot by examining the relationship of their underlying motifs: simhah and yirah.

In Sefer Devarim, we find references to both avodah be-yirah, as well as avodah be-simhah u-betuv lev. In Tehillim we encounter contrasting formulations, which is picked up on by the midrash:

Serve God with fear, and rejoice with trembling.
Tehillim 2:11

עבדו את ה' ביראה וגילו ברעדה:
תהלים ב:יא

Serve God with joy, and come before Him with gladness.
Tehillim 100:2

עבדו את ה' בשמחה באו לפניו ברננה:
תהלים ק:ב

If with happiness, how with fear? If with fear, how with happiness? ... [Rather] With joy – could it be meant without fear? It was taught: with fear. R. Acha said, serve God with fear in this world, to gain entry to the world to come with happiness.

Midrash Tehillim 100:3

אם בשמחה איך ביראה; ואם ביראה איך בשמחה? ... בשמחה יכול שלא ביראה ת"ל ביראה. אמר ר' אחא עבדו את ה' ביראה בעולם הזה, כדי שתגיע לעולם הבא בשמחה
מדרש תהלים ק:ג

One perspective, articulated by the midrash, perceives the relationship as one of short-term method and long-term result. Another view depicts yirah and simhah as competing but equally valid approaches to avodat Hashem. However, there is a third integrative approach which may also highlight the relationship between Yom Kippur and Sukkot. According to this thesis avodah be-yirah and be-simhah are two sides of a single coin, each necessary for a comprehensive and holistic avodat Hashem. Each without the other would be deficient, possibly even destructive. The integration of ahavat and yirat Hashem is rooted in the earliest paradigm in our history. Avraham Avinu (... ירא אלוקים אתה...) already embodies each of these qualities. The Rambam (hil. Yesodei ha-Torah 2:1-2) integrates these themes as one.

This complementary perspective of avodat Hashem me-ahavah and me-yirah is accentuated in the world of Hazal. The gemara (Berakhot 30b) resolves the apparent discrepancy in Tehillim 2:11 by articulating this principle:

And rejoice with trembling – in the place of rejoicing there should be trembling.

Berachot 30b

וגילו ברעדה-במקום גילה שם תהא רעדה.
ברכות ל:

Elsewhere, King David's outlook is elaborated:

King David said: My fear is from my joy, and my joy is from my fear, and my love is above all.

Tanna Debei Eliyahu Rabbah 3

אמר דוד המלך יראתי מתוך שמחתי. ושמחתי מתוך יראתי. ואהבתי על כולם.
תנא דבי אליהו רבה ג

The function of yirah is evident. After all, yirah is the prerequisite for wisdom and Torah study. It provides the necessary humility and motivation that are a sine qua non for spiritual growth: 'ראשית חכמה יראת ה' – the beginning of knowledge is fear of God. It is unsurprising that the Torah emphatically projects the centrality of yirah.

And now, Yisroel, what does the Lord your God ask of you, only to fear the Lord your God.

Devarim 10:12

ועתה ישראל מה ה' אלוקיך שאל מעמך כי אם ליראה את ה' אלקיך...
דברים י:יב

While the role of simhah is less obvious, it is equally crucial, even indispensable in religious observance and growth. Aside from its prominence on yom tov, it is also a linchpin in nevuah.

The shechina cannot rest within sadness, but rather can only rest within the happiness of a mitzvah.

Shabbat 30b

אין שכינה שורה לא מתוך עצבות אלא מתוך דבר שמחה של מצוה.
שבת ל:

Talmud Torah, the apex and foundation of religious development (כנגד כולן), is particularly associated with a state of simhah based upon the pasuk- פקודי השם ישרים משמחי לב – the statutes of God are straight, and gladden the heart. R. Avraham min ha-Har (Nedarim 48a) posits that the principle of מצוה לאו ליהנות ניתנו (that mitzvah performance is not deemed a personally pleasurable act that would, for example, violate the prohibition of issurei hanaah) does not apply to Torah study which is inherently suffused with spiritual pleasure! R. Aharon ha-Kohen of Lunel (Orhot Hayyim, hil. nesuin) identifies the first of the birkhot nesuin (berakhot celebrating marriage), שהכל ברא לכבודו, which focuses on the very purpose of creation with the concluding berakhah, אשר ברא ששון ושמחה, devoted to the creation of joy and happiness. He explains that the attainment of spiritual joy- avodah by means of simhah- constitutes a significant spiritual achievement because genuine happiness builds a bridge to Hashem. The Rambam concludes hilkhos lulav with a stirring peroration about the importance of avodah me-simhah:

The happiness one should feel with the performance of a mitzvah and love of God that commanded us to perform service is a very great thing. Anyone that refrains from partaking in this happiness is liable to suffer for it, as it says “for you didn’t serve the Lord your God with happiness and good heart.” ... And grandeur and honor is meant only to rejoice before God, as it says “King David danced vigorously before God.”

Rambam Hilchos Lulav 8:15

השמחה שישמח אדם בעשיית המצוה ובאהבת הקל שצוה בהן עבודה גדולה היא. וכל המונע עצמו משמחה זו ראוי להפרע ממנו שנאמר תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלוקיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב... ואין הגדולה והכבוד אלא לשמוח לפני ה' שנאמר והמלך דוד מפזז ומכרכר לפני ה'!
רמב"ם הלכות לולב ח:טו

Normally, the demands of Yom Tov represent a balance between different values and moods. We generally adopt the balanced לה' חצי לה' חצי approach of R. Yehoshua (Pesachim 68b). However, occasionally, the halakhah demands that we accentuate one of the extreme manifestations of avodat Hashem- like simhah or yirah- in order to address particular challenges and so that we might further cultivate and refine our dedication to each independent avodah value. The parallel-contrast of Yom Kippur-Sukkot facilitates greater commitment to each of the values of yirah and simhah respectively. Both Yom Kippur and Sukkot transcend and transform the routine and generic קודש, fostering a more intense expression of אלוקים לפני ה'.

Yom Kippur, the embodiment of avodah me-yirah, overrules many yom tov norms, while Sukkot, suffused with added simhah, intensifies those standard manifestations. The Rambam (hil.Hanukah 3:6; Perush ha-Mishneh R.H. 4:7) explains that hallel is omitted on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (Arakhin 10b) because of a mitigation of simhah in favor of yirah. According to the Rambam (end of hil. tefilah), one should recite tahanun on Yom Kippur! On Sukkot, however, we encounter more than the standard obligation of hallel on yom tov. In

contrast with Pesah, every day of Sukkot generates a full hallel obligation.⁷⁰ The Ramban (Sefer ha-Mitzvot, shoresh 1) considers the possibility that hallel on Sukkot may be a biblical obligation based on the formulation of ושמחתם לפני ה' אלוקיכם שבעת ימים. The gemara in Pesahim (117a) links hallel on Sukkot with the lulav obligation. The Rambam (hil. Lulav 7:10) identifies hallel as the appropriate time for mitzvah and birkhat lulav.

Indeed, while the Rambam (Hanukah 3:6) characterizes Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur as being deficient in simhah-יתירה, אין בהם שמחה יתירה, he depicts Sukkot as a festival of excessive simhah.

Even though on all the moadot there is a mitzvah to rejoice, on Sukkot there was an added joy in the Beit Hamikdash, as it says “And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days”.

Rambam Hilchot Lulav 8:12

אף על פי שכל המועדות מצוה לשמוח בהן בחג הסוכות היתה שם במקדש שמחה יתירה שנאמר ושמחתם לפני ה' אלוקיכם שבעת ימים.. הלכות לולב ז:יב

Yom Kippur projects the centrality of the inuyim and a posture of כולו לה' – completely for God, while the laws of Sukkot calculate and make allowances for human comfort to such an extent that מצטער פטור מן הסוכה – one who is uncomfortable is exempt from sitting in the sukkah.

The parallel-contrast between Yom Kippur and Sukkot establishes not only the common need to rigorously emphasize each of the independent values of yirah and simhah, but also highlights their subtle yet crucial interplay. Neither unbridled inui-yirah nor unfocused hallel-simhah constitute ideal expressions of avodat Hashem. Without precise halakhic structure, these principles are easily abused and corrupted. Like other moadim, Yom Kippur conflicts with and cancels aveilut (mourning). Notwithstanding its inui-yirah focus, Yom Kippur's life-affirming and optimistic underpinnings are inconsistent with extreme depression and categorical loss. According to many halakhic sources, there are numerous expressions of joy and opportunity on this most solemn of days. The Sefer ha-Hinukh stresses this theme in his count of the mitzvot. Rabbenu Yonaton (Eruvin 40a) explains that simhah is the basis for birkat ha-zeman on Yom Kippur. At the same time, simhat yom tov and even simhat Sukkot require proper perspective. The Rambam (hil. Yom tov, end of ch. 6) distinguishes between authentic simhat yom tov and gluttony or frivolity, cautioning the need to avoid a corruption of simhah. At the conclusion of hilchot Lulav, the Rambam reiterates that the primary participants in the joyous simhat beit ha-shoevah celebration that reflects the “שמחה יתירה” theme of Sukkot should be the scholars and religious leaders who were acutely sensitive to genuine spiritually-focused simhah.

In light of these considerations, we may better appreciate the special link between these two unusual moadim. Although and because they represent competing themes in avodat Hashem, the juxtaposition of Yom Kippur and Sukkot is exceedingly meaningful. Yom Kippur is intended to anticipate and pave the way for Sukkot; Sukkot is partially defined by taking place in the

⁷⁰ In Arakhin 10b this is attributed to the differences in the configuration of the korbonot. The Neziv in his Haamek Davar on Emor, Pinhas and Reeh views this factor as representative of broader differences between the holidays, as did Rav Soloveitchik. See, also, Talmud Yerushalmi Sukkah 5:1 where the factor of lulav in the mikdash is cited.

aftermath of Yom Kippur. Is it a coincidence that the shortest time between any moadim separates the extreme manifestations of yirah and simhah?

The Beit Yosef (O.H., 131) records that there is no tahanun between Yom Kippur and Sukkot. This is attributed to the fact that the beit ha-mikdash was established in this period. However, the Arukh ha-Shulkhan (624:7) suggests that motzai Yom Kippur initiates a period of “מי שמחה – days of joy”. It is conceivable that this period bridging yirah and simhah was also particularly propitious time in which to initiate the mikdash, characterized by its own special blend and integration of yirah and simhah.

The Rishonim speculated why Sukkot is not celebrated in the aftermath of yetziat mizrayim which it commemorates (כי בסוכות הושבתי את בני ישראל בהוציא אותם מארץ מצרים)? The Ramban (Emor) and the Tur (beg. Hilkhot Sukkah) posit that climate conditions during Nissan would have obscured the obligatory and spiritual character of the mitzvah of sukkah. However, the Zeror ha-Mor and later, the Arukh ha-Shulhan, propose that the Torah intentionally delayed the holiday of Sukkot in order to integrate its celebration with that of Yom Kippur!

According to the Zohar and many rishonim, we revisit the themes of Yom Kippur on the last day of Sukkot, Hoshanah Rabah. This accounts for many of the special practices and tefilot on this day. It further reinforces the notion that Sukkot and Yom Kippur, and by extension the respective themes of simhah and yirah that they embody, are intended to be mutually enhancing.

We continue to say אורי וישעי לוד ה' אורי וישעי until the end of Sukkot. The simple yet powerful themes of קוה אל ה' חזק ויאמץ לבך וקוה אל ה' שבתי בבית ה' כל ימי חיי לחזות בנועם ה' ולבקר בהיכלו stand at the core of both avodah me-ahavah and avodah me-yirah. Indeed, they articulate the spiritual goal that unites and unifies these seemingly disparate methods.

The Shulhan Arukh formulates the obligation to begin the building of the Sukkah on motzai Yom Kippur twice: once in the last halakhah in hilkhhot Yom Kippur and again in the very first halakhah of hilkhhot Sukkah, which immediately follows hilkhhot Yom Kippur. While the mefarshim labor to distinguish between these seemingly identical contiguous halakhot, it remains puzzling that this theme, even given its multiple nuances, was not encoded in a single location. In light of our analysis of the intricate, mutually enhancing relationship between Yom Kippur and Sukkot, however, we may now appreciate the precision of this classification. The Shulhan Arukh subtly conveys two interrelated perspectives. The building of the Sukkah, crystallizing the ambition of ושמחתם לפני ה', is a fitting climax to and transition from Yom Kippur's avodah me-yirah, even as the afterglow of Yom Kippur's yirah and the charge and promise of ה' תטהרו לפני ה' constitutes the perfect framework to initiate a period of intense avodah be-simhah.