

# Parsha Ponders

Sukkos | September 20, 2021 | 14 Tishrei 5782

## Building a sukkah<sup>1</sup>

ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון פרי עץ הדר כפת תמרims וענף עץ-עבת וערבי-נחל ושמחתם לפני יקוק אלקיכם  
שבעת ימים: בסכת תשבו שבעת ימים כל-האזרח בישראל ישבו בסכת

You shall take on the first day an *esrog* fruit<sup>2</sup>, palm fronds (a *lulav*<sup>3</sup>), myrtle branches<sup>4</sup>, and willow branches, and you shall rejoice before Hashem your G-d for seven days. You shall dwell in *sukkos* for seven days. Every citizen of Israel shall dwell in *sukkos*<sup>5</sup>

*Sukkos* is known as *Zman Simchaseinu*, the time of our rejoicing. The days are accentuated with their unique *mitzvos*, that of taking the four species and dwelling in the *sukkah*. The Torah introduces these *mitzvos* in this precise order, first the four species, then dwelling in the *sukkah*. While the reason for this requires its own study<sup>6</sup>, what's fascinating is the Sages, when they chose the structure of their teachings on the festival, chose to first discuss the laws of the *sukkah*, and only then the laws of the four species. Why did the Sages switch the order from that in the Torah<sup>7</sup>?

The *Sheiltos*, an ancient work composed in the eight century CE, writes something fascinating<sup>8</sup>. He writes that we are obligated to construct a *sukkah*, and dwell in it. This comes from the verse: "you shall make for yourself a *sukkos* festival for seven days"<sup>9</sup>, and "you shall dwell in *sukkos* for seven days"<sup>10</sup>. From the fact that he brings a verse for these two obligations, to build a *sukkah* and to dwell in it,

<sup>1</sup> Based on Hearos Rabbeinu HaGrish Elyashiv Sukkah 2a s.v. דיני סוכה קודם לדיני נטילת ד' מינים

<sup>2</sup> Targum Onkelos and Rashi ad. loc. Literally: a beautiful fruit

<sup>3</sup> Targum Onkelos loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup> Targum Onkelos and Rashi loc. cit.

<sup>5</sup> Leviticus 23:40, 42

<sup>6</sup> See next note

<sup>7</sup> This question is asked by the Aruch LaNer and Poras Yosef to Sukkah 2a. The Aruch LeNer answers because the *Mishnayos* are practical, and practically speaking a person has to start preparing their *Sukkah* before they must prepare their four species (as we'll see, this is not so different than what Rav Elyashiv suggests). They also fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Sukkah* the first evening, and the four species only the following morning. However, this doesn't explain why the Torah lists the opposite order. I once heard a different explanation from Rabbi Reznick, who said that the Torah describes things from our perspective, and the Sages described things from Hashem's perspective. This comes from an idea given by Rav Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev, brought in Tosafos Chadashim to Pesachim 1:1, to explain why the Torah calls the holiday of Pesach *Chag HaMatzos*, whereas we call it Pesach. Hashem focuses on the fact that we faithfully left Egypt without provisions other than the bread on our backs (which baked into *matzah*), and we call it Pesach to commemorate Hashem "skipping" over the Jewish houses during the final plague, sparing the Jewish firstborn. Rabbi Reznick applied the same to *Sukkos*. The *sukkah* is meant to remind us of Hashem's Clouds of Glory, which Hashem used to protect us in the wilderness. The purpose of the four species is to appease Hashem and improve our relationship with him (see Sukkah 38a, Ta'anis 2b, and Ritva to Sukkah 9a s.v. והוא מיבעי and ibid 31a s.v. (ת"ר), so the Torah lists it first. I seem to recall Rabbi Dovid Heber of Baltimore saying a similar explanation from the Tzelach, but I couldn't find it anywhere. All I found was that in Noda B'Yehudah Al HaMoadim ארבעת המינים לולב, there's something from his son-in-law Rav Yosef from Pozna, (brought in his work Zichron She'eiris Yosef), who asks the same question about the discrepancy, and answers like the Aruch LaNer. He adds that the Torah lists the four species first, because the verse is dealing with the *chagigah* offering, which is brought by day

<sup>8</sup> Sheiltos § 169

<sup>9</sup> Deuteronomy 16:13

<sup>10</sup> Leviticus 23:42

implies he held that there's a separate *mitzvah* to construct a *sukkah*<sup>11</sup>. Others also seem to hold this way<sup>12</sup>, even though it's not the predominant view of the *halachic* authorities over the generations.

This opinion is a bit surprising, since we don't normally ascribe full *mitzvah* status to preparatory steps towards a *mitzvah*. It's not a *mitzvah* to buy *matzah*, even though it is a requirement in order to eat it. It's not a *mitzvah* to construct our four species, even though it is a requirement in order to take them. These acts are usually called *מצוות הכשר*, preparatory steps towards a *mitzvah*. It must be that constructing a *sukkah* is different. Since it has its own special verse, unlike other *מצוות הכשר*, the Sheiltos and others are justified in understanding this to be a *mitzvah* in its own right. There are even opinions<sup>13</sup> (which we don't follow practically) which say to make a blessing upon constructing a *sukkah*. This view makes more sense in light of the Sheiltos' understanding.

Perhaps this understanding can answer the question we started with. If the Torah starts discussing the *mitzvah* of the four species, and only afterwards the *mitzvah* of *sukkah*, why did the Sages reverse the order? Perhaps we can suggest that the Sages wanted to teach us with a practical mentality. What's the first *mitzvah* which is to occur as we approach *sukkos*? The *mitzvah* to build the *sukkah*<sup>14</sup>. This *mitzvah* is fulfilled the day before *sukkos*, or even many days before. Therefore, the Sages decided to begin their teachings with the laws of a *sukkah*<sup>15</sup>.

Chag Sameach and Gut Yom Tov!

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<sup>11</sup> HaEmek She'eilah *ad. loc.* infers this

<sup>12</sup> Rav Elyashiv brings Rashi to Makkos 8a s.v. השתא נמי

<sup>13</sup> Yerushalmi Sukkah 1:2, brought by Tosafos to Sukkah 46a s.v. העושה

<sup>14</sup> As already mentioned, the Aruch LaNer suggests basically the same explanation, yet his is simpler

<sup>15</sup> See Avnei Nezer Orach Chaim 459:10,11