

Parsha Ponders

Sukkos | September 28, 2023 | 14 Tishrei 5784

Perfectly imperfect¹

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 for yourselves on the first day [of Sukkos] a beautiful fruit (an esrog), date-[palm] fronds, braided branches (*hadassim*), and willows of the brook. 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*²

It's *Sukkos* time. The two main *mitzvos* associated with the Festival are the *mitzvah* to dwell in a *Sukkah* for seven days, and to take the four species, namely the *lulav* (palm frond), *esrog* (citron), *aravos* (willow), and *hadassim* (myrtle). What's surprising is that, although these two *mitzvos* are adjacent to each other in the Torah, and they coincide on the same festival, they are polar opposites of each other. Jews are so careful about their four species that they are so perfect. Some spend hours making sure they are blemish free and as beautiful as can be.

In contrast, the laws of building a *Sukkah* are quite unique in the Torah. There are many leniencies in its construction, making it possible to almost have no walls at all. First of all, gaps less than three fist-widths are discounted³. The walls don't have to reach the *sechach* roof⁴. If there's invalid roofing near the walls but it's valid in the center of the *Sukkah*, sometimes we look at the walls as if they are touching the valid part⁵. We would never allow holes in our esrog or half-length lulavs. And yet the *halacha* is totally fine with all of these imperfections with the *Sukkah*. What's the difference?

Our Sages compare⁶ the four species with four body parts. The *lulav* resembles the spine, the *esrog* resembles the heart. The *aravos* resemble the lips, and the *hadassim* resemble the eyes. The intent here is I want to serve Hashem with my entire body. I want my heart to be pure. I want my eyes to be proper. I want my lips to be appropriate. I want my spine to be perfect. We want to approach our Divine Service of Hashem with complete perfection. We try our best, and that's all that's expected of us.

On the other hand, the *Sukkah* represents the Divine Presence⁷. We are entering Hashem's domain, so-to-speak, when we enter the *Sukkah*. As such, the laws of the *Sukkah* tell us that Hashem accepts us for who we are. No matter what our blemishes are, our imperfections, that's okay. Hashem will take us in lovingly, either way.

Both approaches are true. It's all about perspective.

Wishing you a *Chag Sameach*, a joyous Yom Tov!

¹ Based on a *devar Torah* from [Rav Shraggi Kallus](#), available here:

<https://www.torahanytime.com/#/lectures?v=208701> (end)

² [Leviticus 23:40, 42](#), with [Targum Onkelos](#) and [Rashi](#)

³ Known as "*Lavud*"

⁴ Known as "*Gud achis*"

⁵ Known as "*Dofen Akuma*"

⁶ [Vayikra Rabbah 30:14](#)

⁷ See [Zohar III parshas Emor p. 103b](#) (with [HaSulam](#)), [Neizer HaKodesh](#) to [Bereishis Rabbah 70:8](#), and [Pesach Einayim](#) to [Sotah 11a s.v. שנאמר](#). See also [Shir HaShirim Rabbah 2:1](#)