

The Rebbe's Discourses

Free Summaries of Points from the Rebbe's
Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל

ד"ה בסוכות תשבו תשל"ג בלתי מוגה

Published for Succot

15 Tishrei 5784, 30 September 2023¹

COMBINING OPPOSITES...

THE COMMAND TO DWELL IN SUCCOT EXPRESSES A NUMBER OF CONTRADICTIONS. The verse states ‘In Succot (booths) you should dwell for seven days, every citizen in Israel should dwell in Succot, in order that your generations should know that I made the Israelites dwell in Succot when I took them out of Egypt.’² A Succah, a booth or hut, means something temporary, impermanent. The word ‘dwell’ implies actually living in it, in a settled way. Further, the mention of seven days also implies permanence. Seven days is the basic unit of time: G-d created the world on the First Day and then on the Seventh, He rested. The cycles of seven days have continued since Creation, and so the phrase ‘seven days’ also implies being thoroughly embedded in existence. But the basic theme of the Succah is impermanence. How do these two opposites fit together?

Another combination of opposites regarding the Succah is that on the one hand, it ‘surrounds’ the person. The Succah thus suggests the ‘surrounding radiance’ described in Chassidic teachings. But the Torah also tells us that we dwell in the

¹ *BaSuccot Teishvu* 5733, published in *Dvarmalchut Succot* 5784. The discourse was not edited by the Rebbe.

² Leviticus Emor 23:42-3.

Succah ‘in order that your generations should *know...*’. In Chassidic terms, ‘knowledge’ means something inward. When we speak of the Sefirot Wisdom Understanding and Knowledge, expressing different aspects of the mind, the concept Knowledge means internalising the idea and being totally focused on it³. It is also noteworthy that ‘Knowing’ that one is in the Succah is part of the halachah concerning dwelling in the Succah⁴.

The process of knowledge and internalisation is the opposite of the idea conveyed by ‘surrounding radiance’, which implies something which transcends one’s understanding. Why does the Mitzvah of Succah combine these opposites?

Let us consider the meaning of Succot in relation to Rosh Hashannah. There is a famous idea in Chassidic teaching that those aspects which were hidden on Rosh Hashanah, are revealed on Succot.

First and foremost on Rosh Hashanah is the blowing of the Shofar. The general Jewish custom for this, is to sound one hundred blasts on the Shofar, which combine three different notes: the straight clear Tekiah, the triple sound of the Shevarim, and the warbling note of Teruah. Kabbalistic texts point out that the special leafy roof of the Succah, the S’chach סכך, has the Gematria 100, like the total number of Shofar blasts. Further, the individual letters Samech = 60, Kaf = 20, Kaf = 20 represent the numbers of Tekiah, Shevarim and Teruah respectively.

The blasts of the Shofar represent drawing spiritual energy from a supernal ‘surrounding’ dimension, and then drawing it into the inward dimension of each individual and of the Jewish people as a whole.

Another aspect of Rosh Hashanah is the theme of Repentance, that the one who is ‘far’ becomes ‘near’⁵. The very fact of one’s soul entering this world with its temptations and challenges can be seen as an example of becoming very ‘far’ from one’s sacred origin (and even more so if one succumbs to the temptations) – and nonetheless, the goal of Jewish teaching is that one should become ‘near’, through the process of Repentance. And in fact, the one who has been far and now comes near can reach even higher than one who was never far. The repentant sinner reaches a higher level than the one who never sinned⁶.

In this process of Repentance, particularly expressed on Rosh Hashanah, we again see a joining of opposites: the one who is ‘far’ becomes ‘near’. We also see it in a verse which depicts our plea to G-d on Rosh Hashanah, and His

³ See Tanya, Part 1, ch.3. Wisdom can be understood as ‘inspiration’, Understanding as ‘contemplation’, and Knowledge as a deep internalization of and commitment to the idea.

⁴ This a reason for the halachah that the Succah cannot be more than 20 cubits high, because one needs to be aware of the special nature of the roof of the Succah. If it were higher than 20 cubits one might not notice it. Thus ‘awareness’/‘knowledge’ are actually part of the Mitzvah.

⁵ See Isaiah 57:19 – ‘Peace, peace to the one who is far and near’, interpreted to mean that the one who is far becomes near.

⁶ Berachot 34b.

response: ‘from the narrow place I called to G-d, and He answered me from the Divine breadth’⁷. From being in a narrow place, spiritual and moral ‘straits’, we reach the ‘breadth’ which is understood as the ‘breadth of the Essence’, the transcendent Divine.

Since the concealed aspects of Rosh Hashanah are revealed on Succot, the fact that Rosh Hashanah has within it the joining of opposites means that also on Succot there is the joining of opposites, as we have seen above.

This drawing down of the transcendent, surrounding radiance is also seen in the Mitzvah of the Four Species. Through this Mitzvah the surrounding, transcendent radiance elicited by the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah, and expressed in the sacred leafy roof of the Succah, is drawn inwardly into a person’s being.

This joining of the two opposites of transcendent and inward is achieved by the Four Species because each of them expresses unity: the generally separate leaves of the palm frond are unified in the single compact shaft of the Lulav, the myrtle leaves crowd close together on each stem, the willow is described as growing ‘in brotherhood’ because of the way the willows generally grow together, and the Etrog, the citron, unlike other fruit can spend all the seasons of the year on the tree, growing from each of them.

This spiritual achievement on the part of the Jewish people then spreads beyond them, to the nations of the world. The Midrash⁸ presents the Mitzva of the Four Species as showing openly that the Jewish people are victorious in their battle against negative forces, [and thus draw new life-force into the world on behalf of all humanity].

So too is the case with the seventy bulls which are offered in the Temple⁹ during the Succot festival: they reveal to all humanity that through the service of the Jewish people in the Temple every kind of positive blessing is brought into the world, for the benefit of everyone. The smoke of these offerings ascended on high, reminiscent of the smoke of the incense burnt in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur. Chassidic teachings¹⁰ point out that this fragrant smoke is the source of S’chach covering of the Succah, with its transcendent surrounding radiance.

All of this is a preparation for the true and complete Redemption, when all flesh will see together the revelation of the Divine.

[Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care](#)

⁷ Ps.118:5

⁸ Vayikra Rabbah 30:2

⁹ Numbers Pinchas 29:12-34. The seventy bulls, together with the other offerings, are also mentioned in the Musaf prayers recited during the days of Succot.

¹⁰ See the Rebbe Maharash, *Hemshech Vekocho* 5637, ch.84 ff.