

From Inside to Outside: Yom Kippur and Sukkot

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Sukkot follows almost immediately after Yom Kippur and both share in the atmosphere of Tishrei – one of soul-searching, gazing at the year gone by, atonement, and looking towards the future. Still, as we know, these festivals are very different in essence, mood, and in the laws that characterize them. In this article I suggest that the two holidays sit at opposite poles of single continuum: one that stretches from inwardness to outwardness. This continuum has its source in the Torah, and it is developed further in the Oral Law.

Yom Kippur – a day of “inner service”

The service performed by the *Kohen Gadol* on Yom Kippur, as set forth in *Sefer Vayikra* (chapter 16), takes place in the innermost part of the *Mishkan*. The chapter is introduced with the preparations that Aharon must undertake before entering the Holy of Holies, inside the curtain (vv. 2-4). The sacrifices offered on this day are an ox and a he-goat; they are prepared inside and their blood is sprinkled on the curtain (vv.14-15). One of the central services of the day is the offering of the incense: it usually takes place upon the inner altar,¹ but on Yom Kippur it is drawn even further “inward,” into the Holy of Holies itself (12-13). Atonement for the Sanctuary itself (16) is one of the main objectives of the Yom Kippur service.

There is one verse whose meaning is unclear:

“And he shall go out to the altar that is before God, and make atonement for it...” (v. 18)

Which altar is referred to here? On the one hand, if we read this in conjunction with the previous verse, it would seem to refer to the outer altar, where the burnt offerings are sacrificed. The text reads, “And there shall be no man in the Tent of Meeting when he goes in to make atonement in the holy place, until he comes out... And he shall go out to the altar that is before God...” (vv. 17-18). Likewise, two verses later we read, “And when he has made an end of atoning for the holy place, and the Tent of Meeting, and the altar...” (v. 20). All this would suggest that the altar in question is the outer one. On the other hand, the verse describes the altar as being “before God” – an expression which is used elsewhere with

¹ Note that there were two altars in the *Mishkan* and later in the Temple: the inner (golden) altar, which was located in the Sanctuary itself and upon which incense was offered, and the outer (copper) altar, which was outside the Sanctuary and upon which animal sacrifices were offered.

reference to the golden inner altar. The description in *parashat Tetzaveh* (*Shemot* 30:10) likewise suggests that the golden altar is being referred to.²

While the verses leave some room for doubt, *Chazal* are quite unequivocal in their view. It is the golden inner altar, says the Sifra, that the verse refers to:

“Perhaps the verse refers to the outer altar? (It does not,) as the verse states explicitly, ‘which is before God.’ Thus, the reference is to the inner altar.”³

The halakha is accordingly set down in *Mishna Yoma* (5:5).

Prof. David Henschke notes the distinction in this regard between the practice in the *Mishkan* and that in the Temple.⁴ In the *Mishkan*, atonement was attained on the outer altar on Yom Kippur, while in the Temple, in later generations, the atonement could only be attained – according to *Chazal*’s interpretation of the verses – in the inner parts of the Temple. Henschke explains this by pointing out that in the Temple (in contrast to the *Mishkan*), “the Sanctuary and the [outer] altar are separate domains... In the Temple, the altar is separate from the Temple; it is an entity in its own right, belonging to Israel.”⁵ He quotes a verse from *Divrei Ha-yamim* I: “... This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel” (22:1).

Indeed, on Yom Kippur, Israel (represented by the *Kohen Gadol*) enters the House of the King and His inner rooms.

Sukkot – the festival of the outer altar⁶

In contrast, the Sukkot sacrificial service is located on the outer altar, the altar that “belongs to Israel.” The focus has moved outside.

Once again, our starting point is the Chumash. In *parashat Pinchas* (*Bamidbar* 28-29), where the details of the daily sacrifice and the additional sacrifices are set down, by far the longest section is devoted to Sukkot. Why? On each of the seven days of the festival a different number of sacrifices is offered,

2 This question has been the subject of much discussion; see, for example, D. Henschke, “Le-Seder ha-Avoda be-Yom ha-Kippurim,” *Megadim* 33, 5761, pp. 34-35, and the sources listed in his notes. My intention here is merely to emphasize the unequivocal position of *Chazal* on this question.

3 *Torat Kohanim*, *Acharei Mot* 4:8, Weiss edition 81d.

4 Above, n. 2, pp. 37-39.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

6 Rav Dr. Yakov Nagen (Genack) sets forth in his book *Mayim, Beria ve-Hitgalut: Chag ha-Sukkot be-Machshevet ha-Halakha* (Maggid, 2013) the idea of the dissemination of the *Shekhina* and of holiness during Sukkot throughout Eretz Yisrael; we will cite him below.

and therefore each day's service must be detailed separately. In addition, the overall number of sacrifices offered over the course of the festival – seventy bullocks (in contrast to the one or two offered on other festivals, and a total of fourteen over the whole of the Festival of *Matzot*) and fourteen lambs on each day (in contrast to the seven offered on any other festive day) – is conspicuous in and of itself.⁷

Various explanations have been offered for the changing number of Sukkot sacrifices; but even the simplest reading of the verses shows an intensive level of activity focused around the outer altar. The emphasis has moved from the inner altar and the inner sections of the Temple, which dominate the Yom Kippur service, to the outer altar, which is the focus on Sukkot.

Furthermore, *Bamidbar 29*, which describes the festive sacrifices, neglects to mention any Sukkot commandments or characteristics other than the multitude of additional sacrifices, all introduced with the rather bland heading, “You shall celebrate a feast unto God, seven days.” Contrast this to the other festivals, where a central commandment that characterizes that day is mentioned, apart from the additional sacrifice: the eating of *matzot*, the meal offering of the *bikkurim* (first fruits), the day of sounding the shofar, or the affliction of the soul.

But where are the four species of Sukkot? Their glaring omission emphasizes that the character of Sukkot – at least depicted in this *parasha* – focuses on its sacrificial service. (In *parashat Emor*, too, the four species are mentioned only as a sort of “appendix” to the section on the festivals, appearing only after the summing up of the *parasha*. Contrast this to the other festivals, which are characterized by a specific festival commandment in addition to their sacrifices.)

7 The doubled quantity of lambs was addressed many years ago by Rabbi Yoel bin-Nun in his *shiurim*. He explained that the festival of Sukkot belongs simultaneously to two sets of festivals that appear in this *parasha*: the three pilgrim festivals, on the one hand, and the festivals of the month of Tishrei, on the other. Therefore, the number of lambs is doubled. However, this explanation fails to resolve the question of the number of bullocks. *Chazal* explain (Sukka 55b) that the seventy bullocks correspond to the seventy nations. We can propose an explanation on the level of *peshat*, based on Rabbi Yoel bin-Nun's explanation for the lambs: On the festivals of the month of Tishrei, one bullock is brought each day; on the pilgrim festivals, two are brought each day. The festival of Sukkot, falling as it does under both categories, requires three bullocks each day as a basis. If we deduct three bullocks per day from the total of seventy, we are left with 49 – seven times seven – a highly symbolic number that is especially pertinent within the context of the festivals. For some reason (and many might be proposed), the Torah stipulates that the number of bullocks is reduced day by day over the course of the festival (perhaps because it molds this Festival of Joy as starting out at a certain climactic point which then naturally subsides as the days progress). Therefore, instead of commanding that seven bullocks be offered on each of the seven days, the Torah creates a different structure which starts with ten (over and above the basic three) and goes down to four – which is the only way of dividing 49 in a structure that decreases by one per day.

Along with the above-mentioned unit in *Bamidbar*, another biblical unit worth mentioning in this regard is the inauguration of the Temple by King Shlomo (*Melakhim* I 8). Shlomo gathers the nation on Sukkot (2:65) An enormous quantity of sacrifices is offered on this occasion on the outer altar. In fact, the quantity is so great (vv. 62-63) that Shlomo extends the sanctity of the Temple outwards, to include the courtyard (ibid., 64). Admittedly, these sacrifices are not brought in honor of the festival, nor do they necessarily arise from its sanctity. Nevertheless, it would seem that the choice of timing – the festival of Sukkot, and the doubling of the duration of the festival for that occasion (ibid. 65) – are not coincidental.⁸

In the Oral Law we encounter further manifestations of Sukkot as the “festival of the outer altar.” The two last chapters of *Massekhet Sukka*, dealing with the Temple on Sukkot, do not discuss the sacrificial service; they focus on other activities in the Temple on this festival. Much of the discussion is devoted to the four species, and especially the *lulav* and *arava*. Other commandments described in detail include the ceremonial pouring of the water and the *Simchat Beit Ha-shoeva*.

In these, descriptions the outer altar plays a central role. In the *mishna* describing the commandment of the *arava*, we read:

“They would collect from there young willow branches, and place them upright at the sides of the altar, with their tops bent over the altar... On each day they would encompass the altar once... and on that day they would encompass the altar seven times.” (*Sukka* 4:5)

The entire ceremony centers around the altar – in both senses. The same *mishna* also includes a sort of ceremonial addressing of the altar:

“When leaving, they would say: ‘Beauty to you, O altar; beauty to you, O altar.’ Rabbi Eliezer teaches: ‘To God and to you, O altar; to God and to you, O altar.’”

The teaching of Rabbi Eliezer, according to which God and the altar are addressed together in the same breath, raises a question in the *Gemara*, which explains:

“Does one not thereby associate God’s Name with something else?... What it means is, ‘To God’ we give thanks and ‘to you’ (the altar) we

8 The consecration of the altar in the Second Temple likewise took place during Sukkot (Ezra 3:3-4). It should be pointed out that according to *Chazal* (*Shabbat* 30a; *Mo’ed Katan* 9a) the first seven days were celebrated by Shlomo as the inauguration of the Temple prior to Sukkot, and the next seven days were celebrated as the festival, with no connection to the inauguration of the Temple. However, a reading of the plain text suggests that the two celebrations overlapped.

express praise; 'to God' we give thanks and 'to you' (the altar) we express admiration." (*Sukka* 45b)

Still, even with this clarification, the altar remains a focus of attention. This is true both under positive circumstances, when Am Yisrael observe the Sukkot commandments, and – *le-havdil* – under negative circumstances, when Am Yisrael sins. It is no coincidence that the last chapter of *Massekhet Sukka* cites the story of Miriam, daughter of Bilga, who rejected her Jewish heritage and married a Greek officer.⁹ When the Greeks entered the Sanctuary, she made the altar the focus of her blasphemy:

“Our Sages taught: There was a certain Miriam, daughter of Bilga, who rejected her heritage and married an officer of the Greek kings. When the Greeks entered the Sanctuary, she stamped with her sandal on the altar, saying, ‘Wolf, wolf! For how long will you consume Israel’s money, while failing to stand by them in their time of distress!’” (*Sukka* 56b)

In the commandment of the ceremonial pouring of the water, too, as described further on in the chapter, the altar is at the center. In another commandment, set forth at length in the fifth chapter of the *Mishna* as well as in the *Gemara* – the *Simchat Beit Ha-shoeva* – the same idea of moving outward recurs: “In the night ending the first day of the festival, they would go down to the *Ezrat Nashim...*” – and Rashi explains that the reference is to the *kohanim* and *leviim*, who would descend the steps from the *Ezrat Yisrael*. In other words, in terms of the layout of the Temple, the movement is one going outwards.

So central is the role of the altar over Sukkot that there are statements in *Massekhet Sukka* that connect even the other commandments of the festival, which are observed throughout the country, with the sacrificial service in the Temple:

“Rabbi Abahu said in the name of Rabbi Elazar: Whoever takes up the *lulav* with its binding and the *hadass* with its wreathing is considered as though he had built an altar and offered sacrifices upon it, as it is written, ‘Bind the festival with myrtle branches, up to the horns of the altar’ (*Tehillim* 118:27). Rabbi Yirmiya said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, and Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon of Machoz who had received it from Rabbi Yochanan of Makkut: Whoever makes a binding for the festival through eating and drinking, is considered as though he had built an altar and offered sacrifices upon it, as it is written, ‘Bind the festival with myrtle branches, up to the horns of the altar.’” (*Sukka* 45a-b)

What the above suggests is that, in the Temple, Yom Kippur entails a move inward, into the Sanctuary and the Holy of Holies. And only one

⁹ See *Tosefta Sukka* 4:28, Lieberman edition p. 278.

representative of the Jewish People – the *Kohen Gadol* – enters into that holy place, for a holy and intimate encounter with the *Shekhina*, in the innermost space. On Sukkot, in contrast, there is a spreading of holiness outwards. The *Shekhina* and its holiness move outward, as it were, to the courtyard, the location of the outer altar. There they “encounter” the nation, and there is a celebration of the Divine Presence that takes place outside, with a ceremony of multiple elements around the altar. The focus on the outer altar does not represent worship of the altar itself as an independent entity, as the *Gemara* emphasizes. Rather it highlights the contrast with Yom Kippur: the fact that the encounter with the *Shekhina* takes place on this festival not in the innermost chambers of the King, but rather outside. The *Shekhina* “goes out,” as it were, to Am Yisrael, who have come up to her in pilgrimage, and they meet.

This is a new perspective in which these two festivals represent two parts of a single, all-encompassing process. The two festivals are complementary, each expressing one end of the continuum.¹⁰ The calendrical juxtaposition of these two festivals creates a whole picture with two contrasting elements: one, where Am Yisrael (via their representative) enter to meet God, in an atmosphere of holiness and intimacy, and the other, where the *Shekhina* comes out, as it were, to meet Am Yisrael, thereby creating a mass encounter of joy.

Parallels between *Yoma* and *Sukka*

A comparison of the *mishnayot*, *beraitot* and Talmudic discussions concerning these two holidays shows a number of unexpected parallels between them, both of language and content. This is unsurprising, considering the contrasting and complementary aspects of the two holidays discussed above. Not all parallels will be treated here,¹¹ but I shall cite two examples.

1. Concerning Yom Kippur, the Torah states: “And there shall be no man in the Tent of Meeting when he goes in to make atonement in the holy place, until he comes out” (*Vayikra* 16:17). This law emphasizes the intimate aspect of the encounter between the representative of *Am Yisrael* and the *Shekhina* on this day. In *Yoma* we learn that this law also applies to the area between the *Ulam*

¹⁰ This is a different perspective on the holidays of Tishrei, which are typically divided with Rosh ha-Shana and Yom Kippur on the one hand, and Sukkot on the other. My intention is not to reject that perception but rather to enrich it by highlighting other elements.

¹¹ Some further parallels that are not treated above:

a. The formula “[For] **all seven days** a person makes his *sukka* a permanent [dwelling] and his house [a] temporary one” concerning the festival of Sukkot (Mishna *Sukka* 2:9) recalls the formula that appears several times in the first chapter of *Yoma*, concerning the seven days of separation observed by the *Kohen Gadol*; see also below in the body of the text, in example 2.

b. The *Mishna* in *Sukka* (2:8) describes how strict Shammai the Elder was about everyone dwelling in the *sukka*, even very young children, to the extent that he placed even the infant born to his daughter-in-law in the *sukka*. A similar story about Shammai the Elder and children appears in one other place: “It happened that Shammai the Elder did not wish to feed his son...” (*Tosefta Kippurim* 4:2, Lieberman edition, p. 249).

(the hall leading to the *Kodesh*, or outer room of the Temple) and the altar. The *Amoraim* discuss the specifics of this rule and how strictly it applies (*Yoma* 44a-b). In any event, even if this prohibition is merely a desirable stringency, or a “fence” established by *Chazal* in order to prevent anyone entering any further inward, the law expresses intimacy and inwardness. In *Sukka*, by contrast, we find an opposite law, unique to Sukkot, whereby entry into this area is permitted beyond what is allowed in the rest of the year: “Reish Lakish said: *Kohanim* who are physically blemished may enter between the *Ulam* and the altar in order to fulfill their obligation concerning the *arava*” (*Sukka* 44a).¹² Thus we find that this “in-between” area is considered part of the inner area of the Temple on Yom Kippur, when, at certain times, only the *Kohen Gadol* may be present. However, during Sukkot the *same area* is considered part of the outside area of the Temple, another example of the trend of expansion and reaching out towards the rest of the nation.¹³

2. The *Yerushalmi* (*Sukka* chapter 2, 53a) cites the opinion of R. Eliezer, who derives the laws of sitting in the *Sukka* during the seven days of the festival from the seven days of consecration of the *Mishkan*. As we know, the seven days of separation observed by the *Kohen Gadol* prior to Yom Kippur are likewise derived from those inaugural days (beginning of *Yoma* in both the *Yerushalmi* and the *Bavli*).

Yet although both Yom Kippur and Sukkot derive laws from the seven inaugural days of the *Mishkan*, Rabbi Yoel bin-Nun¹⁴ points out an important contrast between Yom Kippur and the seven days of consecration. On Yom Kippur, as mentioned, the service is inward-directed. On the eighth day of the consecration of the *Mishkan*, in contrast, there was no “internal” service. Even the blood of the sin-offering offered by Aharon was not brought inside.¹⁵

Thus, Rabbi bin-Nun describes the eighth day as the day of the appearance of the *Shekhina* over the entire *Mishkan*. The *Shekhina* appears in fire atop the outer altar, in contrast to the usual situation in which the fire is brought by man. The appearance of the fire atop the outer altar was a revelation before the entire nation, and therefore took place outside. Rabbi bin-Nun describes Yom Kippur as a deliberate contrast to that original eighth day, an attempt to solve the problem, as it were, that resulted from the tragedy of that day (the deaths of Aharon’s two sons; see *Vayikra* 10). It became evident that the revelation of the Divine Presence in fire or in incense to the entire people could not be properly contained, and could have disastrous consequences. The

12 See Rashi ad loc.

13 As some of the Rishonim understand it, even Israelites would encompass the altar and were permitted to enter this “in-between” area. See Y. Nagen, *Mayim, Beria ve-Hitgalut*, p. 99.

14 “Ha-Yom ha-Shemini ve-Yom ha-Kippurim,” *Megadim* 8, 5749, pp. 9-34.

15 Indeed, even the incense – as Rabbi bin-Nun notes – which is usually offered with fire that is brought inside, was not supposed to be brought in on the eighth day; this was precisely the sin of Aharon’s sons.

solution, then, was Yom Kippur, when the *Shekhina* remained concealed in its “inner chambers,” and just one representative of the nation would enter, under strict and limited conditions, to atone for the people and to represent them in the encounter with the *Shekhina*.

In light of the above, we now have a better understanding of the equation between Sukkot and the days of consecration. In fact, this equation now seems quite natural, since at both times the essence of the Divine service is “outside,” in contrast to Yom Kippur. However, on Sukkot there is no real “Divine revelation,” as there was during the days of consecration, owing – as noted – to the difficulty and danger entailed by such a revelation in a mass gathering. However, *after* the experience of Yom Kippur, when the nation remains “behind the scenes,” far from the *Shekhina* itself, concealed in the inner chambers, then there is room for the other extreme: the participation of the entire nation, if not in an actual encounter with the *Shekhina*, then at least in proximity to it. The entire nation celebrates and rejoices “before God,” as during the days of consecration, and this mass festivity is conducted outside, so that the entire nation can indeed participate. While the *Shekhina* may not be revealed in a tangible way, its presence is represented by the regular fire – which consumes the many sacrifices brought by the people – upon the outer altar.

The spreading of the *Shekhina* on Sukkot – even outside of the Temple

So far we have focused on the festive Temple service. But Sukkot also has other aspects that are given extensive attention in *Massekhet Sukka* (occupying the first three chapters): the commandment of the *sukka* and of the four species.

Rabbi Dr. Yakov Nagen¹⁶ argues that the *sukka* and the other commandments of the festival¹⁷ are an expression of the spread of the *Shekhina* during Sukkot even beyond the outer Temple precincts, all the way – as it were – to the home (or *sukka*) of every individual in Israel. Much of his discussion is devoted to establishing the connection between the *sukka* and the Temple. I shall not repeat the excellent discussion here, but rather cite just part of his conclusion, in the section entitled, “*Sukka* – the spread of the *Shekhina* from the Temple to the home”:

16 See n. 6 above. Many of the connections and parallels between Yom Kippur and Sukkot that I have mentioned appear in R. Nagen’s discussion too.

17 R. Nagen addresses the aggadic statements cited above, comparing the four species to a sacrifice, in a slightly different way from the approach adopted here. He develops the idea of the four species as a sacrifice, as part of a perception of the spread of the *Shekhina* throughout Eretz Yisrael, which facilitates this sort of “sacrifice” throughout the country and not only in the Temple. See *Mayim, Beria ve-Hitgalut*, pp. 96-101.

“On Sukkot, the *Shekhina* comes to us, to our dwelling... After Yom Kippur, when the *Kohen* enters the Holy of Holies, God ‘repays’ us, and comes down to our *sukkot*, so as to enrich our lives with His Presence.”¹⁸

In my view, the above discussion concerning the outer altar representing the spread of God’s presence complements R. Nagen’s idea about the *sukka* representing God’s presence.¹⁹

The *Chuppa* and the days of celebration

Perhaps we might describe the process set forth above, starting on Yom Kippur and reaching its completion on Sukkot, in a different way, using the concepts of the well-known metaphor of the “marriage” between *Am Yisrael* and God. Yom Kippur represents the intimate encounter in which the groom brings the bride into his home. Sukkot, in contrast, parallels their emergence for the seven days of celebration. Thus, these two festivals represent, each year anew, the renewal of the bond of marriage between God and *Am Yisrael*.

In this context it is appropriate to cite, in a homiletical manner, the well-known verse: “On the day of his marriage and on the day of the rejoicing of his heart” (*Shir Ha-shirim* 3:11). The two parts of this verse are interpreted in different *midrashim* as expressing two different stages in God’s relationship with Israel. While there is no tannaitic source that explains “on the day of his wedding” as a reference to Yom Kippur and “on the day of the rejoicing of his heart” as a reference to Sukkot, there is a *midrash tannaim* that comes close to the idea expressed above:

18 Pp. 65-67.

19 Following R. Nagen, we might add further contrasts between the two holidays in terms of their laws:

a. The *Gemara* (*Yoma* 10a) distinguishes between the inner chamber to which the *Kohen Gadol* retires in anticipation of Yom Kippur, and the *sukka*, to which all of Israel emerge outward, on Sukkot.

b. Another possible parallel is between the prohibition of eating on Yom Kippur and the commandment to eat on Sukkot (*Sukka* 2:6). Admittedly, this eating is part of the commandment to dwell in the *sukka*; however, there are opinions among the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* maintaining that, at least according to the opinion of R. Eliezer, there is an independent commandment to eat on Sukkot. (For the different opinions see D. Henschke, “Ematai Yoshvim ba-Sukka? Le-Shichzura shel Mishna Rishona,” in D. Boyarin et al. [eds.], *Atara le-Chaim, Mechkarim be-Sifrut ha-Talmudit ve-ha-Rabbanit Likhvod Professor Chaim Zalman Dimitrovsky*, Jerusalem 5760, p. 88 and notes ad loc. See also Henschke’s arguments against these approaches. On the other hand, see the *aggada* connected to the statement cited above: “Whoever makes a binding for the festival through eating and drinking, is considered as though he had built an altar and offered sacrifices upon it.” We also recall a similar statement made in *Yoma* (81b, with parallels in other *massekhtot*): “Whoever eats and drinks on the ninth [of Tishrei – the day before Yom Kippur] is considered as though he fasted on the ninth and the tenth.”)

“On the day of his wedding’ – on the day that the *Shekhina* rested on the Temple; ‘and on the day of the rejoicing of his heart’ – on the day that a new fire descended from on High and devoured the burnt offering and the fats upon the altar.”²⁰

The division presented in the Sifra expresses a similar idea, since “the day of his wedding” speaks of the *Shekhina* resting upon, or entering, the Temple. “On the day of the rejoicing of his heart” is a more public occasion of the revelation of the *Shekhina* outside the Sanctuary, through the descent of fire from heaven onto the outer altar.

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²⁰ *Torat Kohanim Shemini parasha* 1, 16, Weiss edition 44c.