

SUKKOS

PERFECT LULAV, IMPERFECT SUKKAH

Two mitzvos, two standards: perfection for ourselves, room for everyone else

By Rabbi Yehuda Zev Klein

“He doesn’t have to be perfect for me to accept him.”

THE TWO MITZVOS OF SUKKOS

There is a very interesting contrast between the two central mitzvos of Sukkos: the ד' מינים and the sukkah.

When it comes to the lulav, esrog, hadassim, and aravos, we are very meticulous. We strive for total perfection.

We look for the most beautiful esrog, a perfect lulav, hadassim, and aravos. We don’t just want kosher; we want the most mehudar possible.

When it comes to the ד' מינים, we are looking for the best possible version.

But when it comes to the sukkah, we find almost the opposite attitude.

The halachos of sukkah contain so many kulos, so many leniencies: lavud, gud asik mechitzta, gud achis, dofen akumah. You don’t even need four complete walls; two walls and a tefach can suffice.

A certain amount of s’chach pasul can be tolerated. A certain amount of air is acceptable. Even if the walls don’t reach all the way to the s’chach, the sukkah is still kosher.

So we have a fascinating question:

Why is it that when it comes to the ד' מינים, we demand perfection, while when it comes to the sukkah, we seem to allow so much imperfection?

OUR OWN AVODAH

Perhaps the answer lies in the very different messages of these two mitzvos.

The ד' מינים represent our own avodah.

The esrog represents the lev—the heart.

The aravos represent the lips and the mouth.

The hadassim represent the eyes.

And the lulav represents the spine and the body.

We take the *ד' מינים* and say, “Ribono Shel Olam, I am giving You my whole self.”

I want to give You my heart.

I want to speak the way a Yid should speak and eat what a Yid should eat.

I want to be careful about what I look at.

I want to dedicate my entire body to Avodas Hashem.

And therefore, when it comes to our own avodah, we are supposed to strive for perfection.

We should never say, “This is good enough.”

We should always be trying to give Hashem more of ourselves, to become better, purer, and more mehudar in our Avodas Hashem.

HASHEM’S HOUSE

But the sukkah represents something completely different.

The sukkah represents Hashem’s house.

For seven days, we leave our permanent homes and enter a temporary dwelling. But in reality, we are not simply moving into a hut. We are moving into Hashem’s home.

We sit at His table. We invite the Ushpizin. We spend our Yom Tov there.

It’s as if Hashem is saying:

“Come out of your house and come into Mine. Come spend Yom Tov with Me.”

A PLACE FOR EVERY YID

And when we enter Hashem’s house, we realize something remarkable:

There is a place for every Yid in Hashem’s sukkah.

It doesn’t matter what their level of Avodas Hashem is.

And perhaps that is why the halachos of sukkah contain so many kulos.

Because the message of the sukkah is not perfection.

The message is belonging.

And that is the contrast between the מינים 'ד and the sukkah:

The מינים 'ד teach me how I should work on myself.

The sukkah teaches me how I should look at someone else.

When it comes to our own avodah, we strive for perfection.

But when it comes to another Yid, we need a different standard.

LOOKING BEYOND THE FLAWS

When I look at another person, I may see flaws. I may see imperfections.

But the sukkah is teaching us:

He doesn't have to be perfect for me to accept him.

Just as a sukkah can have imperfections and still be a kosher sukkah, a person can have imperfections and still be a Yid.

I can look beyond the flaws. I can give the benefit of the doubt. I can make room for another person.

Just as Hashem makes room for every Yid in His sukkah, we need to learn to make room for every Yid as well.

SUKKAS SHELOMECHA

And perhaps this is also the deeper meaning of the words we say every night in Maariv:

וּפְרוּשׁ עָלֵינוּ סִכַּת שְׁלוֹמֶךָ

“Hashem, spread over us the sukkah of Your peace.”

Why do we need the word “sukkas”? Why not simply say:

וּפְרוּשׁ עָלֵינוּ שְׁלוֹמֶךָ

Perhaps the answer is that the sukkah teaches us what shalom means.

The sukkah teaches us to make room. To accept. To include. To look beyond imperfections.

When it comes to ourselves, we demand more. But when it comes to others, we can't judge — we need to be more lenient.

AN EMBRACE

And there is a beautiful pasuk in Shir HaShirim:

שְׁמָאֵלּוֹ תַּחַת לְרֹאשִׁי וַיְמִינּוּ תַּחְבֵּקֵנִי

“His left hand is beneath my head, and His right hand embraces me.”

Shlomo HaMelech uses this as a metaphor for the incredible love between Hashem and Klal Yisroel.

And when we look at the minimum shiur of a sukkah—two walls and a tefach—we can see a beautiful picture of an embrace.

The two walls can be compared to the arms surrounding us, with the tefach completing the embrace.

It's as if Hashem is saying:

“My children, you don't have to be perfect for Me to bring you into My sukkah. Come inside. I want you with Me.”

And perhaps that is the message of סִבַּת שְׁלוֹמֶךָ.

The sukkah is our model for shalom, acceptance, and achdus.

We are asking Hashem:

Ribono Shel Olam, just as You accept us with all of our flaws and imperfections, help us learn to accept other Yidden with all of their flaws and imperfections.