

**Pesach and Sukkot, the *Mishkan* and the *Mikdash***  
**by Rav Amnon Bazak**

**A. Two calendars**

Many of our conceptions of time are a function of various natural phenomena that occur both in the heavens and here on earth. These phenomena generally occur in cycles, such as the units of days, nights, months and years, and are based on the earth's motion with respect to the sun and moon. As we deal with cycles that repeat themselves, there is no natural starting point at which we can say that the cycle begins. Therefore, this starting point must be determined by some external factor, that exists outside the natural system. Accordingly, different cultures mark the beginning of the new year at different points, which generally relate either to natural phenomena or to historical events. *Halakha*, too, recognizes the impossibility of identifying a single day as the beginning of the new year, and therefore the Mishna at the beginning of Masekhet Rosh Hashanah speaks of "*arba'a rashei shanim*" ("four beginnings of the year") which relate to different areas of *Halakha*.

It is not surprising, then, that we find in the Torah two calendar systems. On the one hand, the Torah explicitly says that the year begins with the month of Nissan, as we read this morning (source no. 1):

: "הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לְקַם רִאשׁ חֳדָשִׁים, רִאשׁוֹן הוּא לְקַם לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה" (שמות י"ב, א)

"This month shall be for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first month of the year for you" (*Shemot* 12:1). Accordingly, throughout the Torah, months are identified in reference to the month of Nissan –

"בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַרִאשׁוֹן", "בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי", - "the first month," "the second month," and so on – with Nissan signifying the beginning of the year.

At the same time, however, another calendar exists, which is a little bit more complicated. As we all know, we celebrate the beginning of the Jewish year on the first of Tishrei, which we call "ראש השנה". This name, however, doesn't appear in the Torah. Still, we do find a few references in The Torah that point to a beginning of the year in the month of תשרי.

The Torah says (source No. 2) that the *yovel* (jubilee year) begins בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּעֶשְׂרֵי לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּיוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים תַּעֲבִירוּ שׁוֹפָר בְּכָל אֲרָצְכֶם: (י) וְקִדַּשְׁתֶּם אֶת שְׁנַת הַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה..."

" In the seventh month, on the tenth of the month; on Yom Kippur you shall sound a *shofar* throughout your land. You shall consecrate the fiftieth year...This is your jubilee year..." ( *Vayikra* 25:9-10).

The occasion of Yom Kippur marks the "new year" of the *yovel*. And yet, the Torah also speaks of the festival of *Sukkot* as occurring בצאת השנה (source No. 3): "And the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in the results of your work from the field". The Torah (source No. 4) also requires conducting the *hakhel* ceremony: "מִקֵּץ שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים בְּמֵעַד שְׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָּה בַּחַג הַסֻּכּוֹת"

"at **the end** of seven years, at the time of the *shemita* year, on the festival of *Sukkot*" (Devarim 31:10).

These verses raise a number of questions. First, how can we view the festival of *Sukkot* as marking the end of the year, if Yom Kippur, that is celebrated a few days before, signifies the beginning of the year? Also, what exactly is the nature of this calendar, and how does it relate to the calendar that begins with Nissan?

It would appear that the two calendars in the Torah represent two different perspectives. The calendar that begins in Tishrei serves as the agricultural calendar, which starts at the beginning of the agricultural year and ends at the end of that year. This year naturally begins and ends during the period of Tishrei. Since we are talking about an agricultural year, it is impossible to point to a

specific day as the beginning of that year, because the agricultural year starts on different days every year, according to weather conditions etc. This point has even greater meaning, since the calendar in the Torah is based upon the lunar cycle, as opposed to the earth's cycle around the sun. Therefore, the Torah viewed the **entire** month of Tishrei as the period of transition from one agricultural year to another. The nature of Sukkot is the occasion of *chag ha-asif*, the festival celebrating the collection of one's harvested produce, when a person finally enjoys the results of his work throughout the year. By its nature, then, this festival symbolizes the end of the year. However, during this period people also begin their preparations for the coming agricultural year, and that's why we may view this month also as the beginning of the new year. The selection of this season as the beginning and end of the year is the most natural choice, as this season marks the beginning and end of the agricultural process. We call the first day of this month ראש השנה, because it's the first day of the month that represents the beginning of the year.

At first glance, the designation of Nissan as "the first of the months" also relates to the agricultural reality. The Torah emphasizes in several places that this month is "חודש האביב" ("the month of spring" – *Shemot* 13:4, 23:15, 34:18, and elsewhere), which perhaps refers to the renewed blossoming of the land's vegetation. However, the Torah also makes a point of emphasizing that the importance of "the month of spring" lies in its historical significance (source No. 5):

"שָׁמֹר אֶת חֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב וְעָשִׂיתָ פֶּסַח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי בַחֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב הוֹצִיאָךְ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִמִּצְרָיִם לַיְלָה" (דברים ט"ז, א).

"Observe the month of spring and perform the *pesach* ritual for the Lord your God, for it was in the month of spring that the Lord your God took you from Egypt, during the night" (*Devarim* 16:1).

The selection of the month of Nissan as "the first of the months" stands in contrast to the natural, agricultural year. The calendar that begins with Nissan

represents the historical year, which begins and ends on the first day of the month in which *Bnei Yisrael* left Egypt.

More generally, we might say that the agricultural year expresses the universal calendar, while the historical year expresses the unique calendar of *Am Yisrael*, which is connected to the most significant date in the nation's history – the date of the Exodus from Egypt.

This idea can help us understand the famous disagreement regarding the question, exactly when the world was created, in *חודש ניסן* or in *חודש תשרי* (source No. 6):

“R’ Eliezer said: The world was created in Tishrei, R’ Joshua said: The world was created in Nissan”.

This disagreement can be understood as two different views as to what the world was created for. The view that the world was created in *תשרי* is saying that the world was created for a universal purpose, that *עם ישראל* need to publicize God's name and spread his Torah positively throughout all the nations.

The opposing view of *רבי יהושע* represents a more specific purpose to the world's creation, that the whole aim of creation was for *עם ישראל* to build and strengthen their personal connection and commitment to *ה'.*

Of course, this disagreement has both philosophical and practical implications. For example, should a Jew view his responsibilities in this world to work for the greater good of the general population, or to focus more on his Jewish national responsibilities? However, this is not the main topic of the shiur.

## **B. Pesach and Sukkot**

In light of what we have seen until now, it is not surprising that the two *תגים* which stand at the center of these two months – *תשרי* in *סוכות* – and *פסח* in

*ניסן* – represent these two aspects. *תג סוכות* expresses the universal aspect, whereas *פסח* expresses the aspects that are unique to *עם ישראל*.

Sukkot as *חג האסיף*, when you “gather in the results of your work from the field” expresses by definition the universal aspect, as a festival of general significance, that doesn't relate specifically to *עם ישראל*. It is true that there is also an historical significance to the festival of *סוכות*, as the Torah mentions in one instance (source No. 7):

בַּסֻּכּוֹת תִּשְׁבּוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כָּל הָאֶזְרָח בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יֹשְׁבוּ בַּסֻּכּוֹת: לְמַעַן יָדְעוּ דַרְתֵּיכֶם כִּי בַּסֻּכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי יְקֹוֹק אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

"...in order that you shall know for all generations that I had the Israelites dwell in *sukkot* when I took them from the land of Egypt" (*Vayikra* 23:43).

But all the other references to Sukkot in the Torah, stress the agricultural meaning of this holiday. Sukkot is not only significant as the conclusion and expression of thanksgiving for the year that has passed, but also as a prayer and judgment for the coming year, as the Mishna says in *Masekhet Rosh Hashana* (source No. 8), "On Sukkot we are judged with regard to water." This notion has origins already in *Tanakh*, but, interestingly enough, it appears in relation to the universal aspect, as we read in the prophecy of *זכריה* (source No. 9): "All who remain from among the peoples who shall come upon Jerusalem – they shall ascend each and every year to bow (*באוּ*) to the King, the Lord of Hosts (*הוֹסֵט*), and to celebrate the festival of Sukkot. And he who does not ascend from among the families of the earth to Jerusalem to bow to the King, the Lord of Hosts – rain shall not fall upon them" (*Zekharya* 14:16-17). These verses clearly indicate that in the future, all people on earth will participate in the celebration of Sukkot, given the close connection between Sukkot and rainfall during the season following the festival. This phenomenon is of course relevant to all the nations, and therefore they are all expected to take part in this celebration.

*Chazal* expressed this association between Sukkot and the other nations of the world in the well known passage that views the seventy bulls sacrificed in *בית המקדש* on Sukkot as corresponding to the seventy nations (*Masekhet Sukka*

55b). This aspect lends special significance to the universal aspect of the holiday, as *Chazal* express in *Shir Ha-shirim Rabba* (1:2; source No. 10): "Just as a dove [brought as a sin-offering] atones for misdeeds, so do Israel atone on behalf of the nations, for all those seventy bulls that they sacrifice on the festival [Sukkot] correspond to the seventy nations, so that they will not be absent from the world."

On Pesach, on the other hand, the picture is totally different. This festival is unique to *Am Yisrael*, for only they were saved by ה' from Egypt. Moreover, the Torah emphasizes the prohibition against the celebration of this festival by a gentile (source No. 11): "The Lord said to Moshe and Aharon: This is the law of the *pesach*: no foreigner shall eat of it... If a foreigner who dwells with you would offer the *pesach* to the Lord, all his males shall be circumcised, and then he may draw near to perform it and shall be like a citizen of the land; but no uncircumcised person may eat of it". (*Shemot* 12:43-48)

On this basis we might explain why *korban pesach* and ברית מילה are the only two מצוות עשה (affirmative commands) which carry the punishment of *karet* (eternal excision from the Jewish people). ברית מילה signifies the individual's covenant with ה', while the קרבן פסח serves as the expression of the covenant between all *Am Yisrael* and ה'.

Indeed, throughout the *Tanakh*, we always find חג הפסח in the context of a renewal of *Am Yisrael's* covenant with God. For example, after the generation who left Egypt died in the desert, יהושע בן נון entered ארץ ישראל with בני ישראל, and the first two מצוות they performed in ארץ ישראל were ברית מילה and פסח (source No. 12): "Because for forty years the Israelites traveled in the desert until all those of the people who were military men, who had left Egypt, and had not heeded the voice of the Lord, had died out; those about whom the Lord swore not to show them the land that He had sworn to their fathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. But He raised up their children in their place, and

Yehoshua circumcised them, since they were still uncircumcised... The Israelites made camp at Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month..."

Celebrating *pesach* is also mentioned in the context of the religious revolution led by King Yoshiyahu. After ספר התורה was found in בית המקדש, Yoshiyahu set himself to the task of cleaning the land from idolatry (source No. 13): " And the king stood at his place and made the covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord and to observe his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written at this book; and all the people stood for the covenant. And the king commanded Chilkiyahu the high priest... to remove from the temple all the vessels that had been made for the Ba'al and for the ashera and for all the hosts of the heavens..."

At the end of this revolution, as we could expect, a great פסח celebration was conducted in Jerusalem, such as had not been known since the days of the Judges: "And the king commanded all the people, saying: Keep the passover to the Lord your God, as it written in this book of the covenant... A *pesach* like this had not been conducted in Israel since the days of the prophet Shmuel, and all the kings of Israel did not conduct a *pesach* similar to that which Yoshiyahu conducted " (II *Melakhim* 23:21-22);

We find another example in the פסח celebration that occurred in the days of שיבת ציון, the returning from the exile in בבל. This celebration symbolized the struggle against the mixed marriages with the foreign nations (source No. 14): "And the people of the exile kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month... and the children of Israel who had returned from the exile, and all such as had separated themselves to them from the defilement of the nations of the land, to seek the Lord, God of Israel, did eat of it. And they celebrated the Festival of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy..." (Ezra 6:19-22).

In all the cases that we saw, תג הפסח emphasized the unique connection between עמ ישראל and ה'.

### C. The *Mishkan* and the *Mikdash*

It is interesting to note how what we had said until now relates to the relationship between the משכן and בית המקדש. Here, too, we find the difference between Nissan and Tishrei. The dedication of the *Mishkan* took place on the first of Nissan – the day that marks the beginning of the "historical" new year, that is unique to עמ ישראל (source No. 15): "On the first month of the second year, on the first of the month, the *Mishkan* was set up" (*Shemot* 40:17). On the other hand, the dedication of בית המקדש took place in חודש תשרי, during תג הסוכות (source No. 16):

Shlomo then assembled the elders of Israel... in Jerusalem, in order to bring the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord from the City of David, which is Zion. All the people of Israel assembled to King Shlomo in the month of Etanim – the seventh month – on the festival [of Sukkot]... Shlomo observed the festival [of Sukkot] at that time, together with all Israel, an enormous assembly – from Levo Chamat until Nachal Mitzrayim – before the Lord our God, seven days and seven days – fourteen days. (I *Melakhim* 8:1-2,65)

How might this be explained?

It seems that the difference described above between Pesach and Sukkot is reflected as well in the distinction between the *Mishkan* and the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. *Bnei Yisrael* built the *Mishkan* alone, without any foreign help, on their way to ארץ ישראל. Its primary purpose was to serve as the site of the *Shekhina's* residence, and the site where God would communicate with עמ ישראל (source No. 17):

" It is there that I will commune with the Israelites... I will make my presence felt among the Israelites, and I will be a God for them. They will realize that I, God their Lord, brought them out of Egypt to make My presence felt among them. I am God their Lord"

(*Shemot* 29:43-46).

The *Beit Ha-mikdash*, by contrast, has another function, which שלמה המלך describes in his prayer at the time of the Temple's dedication – namely, to serve as a site of prayer (source No. 18):

...so that Your eyes shall look upon this building night and day, to the site about which You said, "My Name shall be there," to listen to the prayer that Your servant prays towards this site. And You shall heed the plea of Your servant and of Your nation Israel that they will pray towards this site, and You shall listen from the place of Your residence, in the heavens; You shall listen and forgive. (I *Melakhim* 7:29-30)

Shlomo emphasizes in this context that בית המקדש will serve as a site of prayer not only for *Am Yisrael*, but also for the foreign nations:

And also for the gentile, who is not from Your nation Israel but comes from a distant land for the sake of Your Name – because they will hear Your great Name, Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm – and he comes and prays towards this building: You shall listen from the heavens, the abode of Your residence, and You shall do everything for which the gentile called to You, so that all nations on earth shall recognize Your name and revere You like Your nation Israel and know that Your Name is called upon this building that I have built. (I *Melakhim* 7:41-43)

בית המקדש has a universal function – to bring all nations on earth to the recognition of God, a concept that we find in several well known prophecies (source No. 19): "I shall bring them to My sacred mountain and have them rejoice in My house of prayer; their burnt offerings and sacrifices shall be pleasing upon My altar – for My house shall be called 'a house of prayer' for all the nations" (*Yeshayahu* 56:7); (source No. 17): "Each and every month, and each and every Shabbat, all people shall come to bow before Me – says the Lord" (*Yeshayahu* 66:23).

The universal significance of the *Mikdash* may also express itself in the participation of foreigners in its construction. The building was constructed with the help of Chiram, king of Tyre, who sent wood to Shlomo as an expression of his joy over Shlomo's desire to build a Temple (source No. 21; I *Melakhim* 5:16-25). The משכן, on the other hand, was built only by people from עם ישראל, and only through their donations.

It is clear now why the dedication of the משכן was on חודש ניסן, while the dedication of the בית המקדש was in חודש תשרי. The משכן was a unique site for Am Yisrael, and that is why it was dedicated in the beginning of the unique historical year of the unique calendar of Am Yisrael. בית המקדש, on the other hand, served as "a house of prayer for all the nations", and because of that it was dedicated in the beginning of the universal year, in חודש תשרי, and in the universal festival – חג הסוכות.

The משכן and בית המקדש express different perspectives on the connection between ה' and Am Yisrael. The Mishkan moved from one place to another, and because of that it represented a temporary condition. בית המקדש, by contrast, expresses stability and permanent residence in one location. Only in such a situation, *Am Yisrael* has the ability to expand its influence upon the other nations of the world. פסח and the משכן represent a basic and a temporary stage, while סוכות and בית המקדש express the final and ideal stage, in which עם ישראל has the

duty to perfect the world under the Kingdom of the Almighty - לתקן עולם במלכות  
ש-די.

In his commentary to the verse of "שמע ישראל", רש"י says (Source No. 22):  
"The Lord is our God, the Lord is one – The Lord who is now our God and not the  
God of the other peoples of the world, he will at some future time be the one God",  
and then רש"י quotes the verse that ends the prophecy of זכריה regarding הג  
הסוכות, that we mentioned before: "in that day shall the Lord be one and his  
name One" – ביום ההוא יהיה ה' אחד ושמו אחד.