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SUKKOS 5787

Want to Be Happier? Stop Trying to Feel Good About Yourself

RABBI MOSHE DON KESTENBAUM (Aish.com)

Sukkot is called "the time of our joy." For seven days, we leave our homes and move into a temporary hut. We leave the sturdy walls, the furniture, the possessions – all the things that represent what we've built and accomplished – and sit in a simple structure instead.

Why is this humble dwelling the ideal setting for our deepest joy?

The sukkah is teaching us something surprising about happiness.

We spend enormous energy trying to be happy by feeling good about ourselves. We want to feel accomplished, successful, important. We want other people to respect us. We want to look in the mirror and like what we see.

But what if that relentless need to feel good about ourselves is actually what's blocking us from feeling good?

Say you do something hard: you resist a temptation, give generously to someone in need, hold your temper when every part of you wants to explode. You should feel real joy in that. But the joy can go in two very different directions.

You can think: Look at me. I'm a really great person.

Or you can think: Look what I was just given the chance to do. What a gift.

Both thoughts feel good at first, but they're worlds apart. The first turns the accomplishment into a statement about you. The second lets you appreciate the accomplishment itself. And it's the second one that brings the deeper happiness.

There's something cheap about the joy of ego. It feels good for a moment, but it doesn't last. Once feeling good about yourself becomes the goal, you've created something that always needs to be fed. You need another accomplishment, another compliment, another person to notice you. Then someone else gets the recognition instead. Nobody notices what you did. Someone criticizes you. Yesterday you felt important; today you don't. So you feed the ego again. It's exhausting.

The more you appreciate what you were privileged to do, the humbler you become.

There's another way to live. You do something good and think: I'm grateful I had that chance. I helped someone who was struggling – how fortunate I am that I could. I held myself back when I was furious – I'm grateful I found that strength. You can feel wonderful about what you did without deciding it makes you a wonderful person. You can feel blessed to have served, rather than serving your own ego.

In fact, the more you appreciate what you were privileged to do, the humbler you become. This kind of happiness doesn't need an audience. Nobody has to compliment you. Nobody even has to know. You know what you did, and that's enough. This is a deeper joy than any applause could give you.

THAT MAY BE THE SECRET of the sukkah. All year, we live surrounded by things that remind us of ourselves: my house, my furniture, my possessions, the things I bought, built, accomplished. Then Sukkot arrives, and for seven days we step outside, leaving some of that behind and sit in a simple space devoted to nothing but the moment.

What an extraordinary place to find humility and joy.

Sitting in the sukkah gives you the privilege of doing something meaningful.

Eating, drinking, talking with your family, just sitting there: all of it becomes

part of something bigger. How fortunate you are.

So much of our unhappiness comes from making ourselves the subject of our own lives. Did they appreciate me? Did I accomplish enough? Why did he get the credit instead of me? What does my failure say about me? What does my success say about me? Do I feel good about myself?

The sukkah offers seven days of freedom from those questions. Don't ask what an accomplishment says about you. Just enjoy it. Don't ask what your blessings say about you. Just be grateful for them. Don't ask whether people noticed what you did. Notice what you were given the chance to do. When you're focused on yourself, happiness has to be chased, and it will keep slipping away. You'll always need one more thing to feel good about yourself.

But the moment you stop making yourself the subject, you can see what you've been given, and what you get to do with it.

The sukkah teaches us that we can take joy in what we do without turning it into a verdict on who we are.

We can feel fortunate instead of important.

Humility isn't the enemy of happiness. It might be the happiest place there is.

Say No to Drugs

RABBI NAFTALI SILBERBERG (Chabad.org)

Rabbi Mendel Futterfas was imprisoned in a Siberian labor camp for the crime of assisting his coreligionists in escaping the USSR in the dark post-World War II days. Many of his fellow inmates were professionals and intellectuals from the upper-crust of society, imprisoned because of the ostensible "threat" they constituted to Soviet ideology.

This group often wondered how Mendel maintained his cheerful demeanor despite the sub-human conditions which pervaded the camp. When they posed the question to him, he instantly replied:

"You are all dejected because your incarceration prevents you from materializing your life's goals. My goal in life is to serve G-d. And that—I can do wherever I may be!"

ASIDE FOR THE DAMAGE caused to the body by illegal or other mind-altering substances and excessive consumption of alcohol, as well as their potential for wreaking damage on relationships and careers, they also invariably disappoint those who turn to them in order to fill a void in their lives. In the end, they solve nothing; they only offer a temporary escape from melancholic feelings and/or one's sense of inadequacy and lack of accomplishment. Indeed, even at the moment one is experiencing an artificial high, the problems don't disappear. Even if one succeeds in momentarily removing all worries from the conscious mind, they always lurk in the sub-conscious—never allowing the person to find complete solace. As a wise person once said, "People imagine they can drown their troubles in drink; little do they know that their troubles float..."

But "escapism" isn't relegated to the world of hallucinogenics. On a deeper level, most of our supposed sources of happiness are—to a certain extent—a subtle form of escapism. They are an escape from who we are; an attempt to find happiness from without, instead of finding true happiness within. While we chase transient possessions in our pursuit of happiness, we imagine that the reason for our emptiness and lack of happiness is our failure in achieving our goals. Happiness and utopian bliss are certain to wash over our lives once we've earned our first few million... If only we knew that it is all an exercise in futility. I once saw a quote from mega-millionaire Hollywood icon Jim Carrey, saying that he wishes that everyone had what he did—just so that they could see how meaningless it

all is! Happiness comes not from possessions. While one can find a certain measure of happiness in one's accomplishments, such happiness is also incomplete. For our accomplishments will never fully meet our satisfaction. Ultimate happiness is happiness with who we are, contentment with our very identity.

During the High Holidays—and specifically on Yom Kippur—we connect with our innermost core, the essence of the Jewish soul which is eternally and unconditionally connected to G-d. It is precisely because of this unconditional bond that G-d annually grants us a full-hearted forgiveness, despite our behavior in the previous year. During Yom Kippur, however, the atmosphere is too somber and intense, and we are too involved in serious repentance, for us to savor and appreciate what transpires during those awesome moments. It takes a few days for our incredible fortune to sink in: Connection to G-d is who we are! And because this is our very identity, absolutely nothing can alter it—attempting to disconnect a Jew from G-d would be akin to attempting to transform a cow into a horse!

"Fortunate are we! How good is our portion, how pleasant is our lot, and how beautiful our heritage!"

So for seven days we forget about all else. We leave behind our home and possessions—and all other imaginary sources of happiness—and go out into a flimsy non-weatherproof hut. We sing, rejoice and say *l'chaim*; we're happy because we finally focus and what's really important in life—our own selves!

Celebrating the Unexpected

AVROHOM YAAKOV

The commonly accepted reason for celebrating Sukkos (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 625:1) is to commemorate the Ananei HaKavod, the Clouds of Glory that protected the Jewish people during their forty-year journey through the Sinai Desert on the way from Egypt to the Land of Israel.

Oznayim LaTorah asks an obvious question: Why do we specifically celebrate the Clouds of Glory and not the other miraculous provisions of the desert, such as the Manna that provided food and the rock that supplied water?

He answers that food and water were necessities for survival. Without them, the people simply could not have lived in the harsh desert environment. The Clouds of Glory, however, were different. They represented something beyond basic survival. The Jewish people could and did construct their own shelters for shade and protection. The Clouds were an expression of Hashem's special relationship with His people, providing an added level of comfort, security, and care that was not strictly required. Precisely because they were not essential, they became a reason for additional gratitude.

Perhaps this also explains why Sukkos follows immediately after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Having stood in judgement and prayed for life itself, we emerge grateful simply to have been granted another year. A person who has faced a life-and-death situation is relieved and thankful merely to survive.

Yet Hashem often grants us far more than survival. Good health, financial stability, meaningful relationships, nachas from children and grandchildren, supportive friends, and the ability to live a life of purpose are all gifts that go beyond the basics. These are our modern-day "Clouds of Glory" - blessings that remind us not only that Hashem sustains us, but that He cares for us in a deeply personal way.

In today's world, it is easy to focus on what is missing and overlook what is already present. Sukkos teaches us to notice the extras. The festival invites us to step out of our comfortable homes and into a temporary sukkah, not to dwell on what we lack, but to appreciate the countless blessings that surround us every day.

The message of Sukkos is that gratitude begins not only with thanking Hashem for the essentials of life, but also for the unexpected kindnesses, opportunities, comforts, and moments of joy that make life richer. When we recognize these "Clouds of Glory" in our own lives, our happiness and appreciation naturally deepen.

No Box Is Big Enough

SURI KINZBRUNNER (Aish.com)

There's an ancient rabbinic teaching that compares each of the four species we hold on Sukkot to a different type of Jew. It's a teaching I've never really understood.

The etrog, which has both taste and fragrance, represents those with both Torah and good deeds. The palm branch (lulav), which has taste but no fragrance, represents those with Torah but no good deeds. The myrtle

(hadas), which has fragrance but no taste, represents those with good deeds but no Torah. And the willow (aravah), which has neither taste nor fragrance, represents those with neither (Vayikra Rabbah 30:12-14).

The midrash then tells us that G-d commands us to bind all four together into one bundle.

The message seems beautiful: unity among all types of Jews. But this midrash has made me uncomfortable since the first time I learned it.

Labeling people, putting people into boxes, even figuring out which box I fit into has never sat right with me.

When my family made aliyah with kids of all ages, I found myself thinking about this even more as we tried to figure out where we fit into Israeli society. Why do we label each other? Why can't we all just be Jewish? And who are we to decide who has or doesn't have Torah or good deeds? What exactly are we supposed to take from this midrash?

Maybe it's not simply asking us to recognize different types of Jews. Maybe it's challenging us to recognize the limitations of our own vision.

A different source about the four species (Midrash Tanchuma Emor 28:1) gave me another way to think about it. This one compares the four species to different parts of the human body: the straight, tall lulav is like the spine, the myrtle is like the eye, the willow is like the mouth, and the etrog is like the heart. Each of these body parts, in its own way, serves G-d.

But the myrtle as the eye caught my attention. What does it mean to serve G-d with our eyes? Perhaps it means learning to look favorably toward others, to look for and see the good in people.

That idea changed the way I thought about the first midrash.

What if the four categories aren't descriptions of people's true essence? The person with Torah and good deeds, the person with Torah but no good deeds, the person with good deeds but no Torah, and the person with neither may instead reflect the way we see and categorize people.

We naturally notice what's visible. We see someone's actions, their choices, their community, how observant they are, how they dress, and we place them in a box. Sometimes we even do this to ourselves.

But that box can never tell us who someone truly is.

No box is large enough to contain the essence of a Jewish soul.

Rabbi Kook takes this a step further. Seeing the good in someone doesn't mean being blind to what's wrong. Loving one another doesn't mean ignoring flaws and shortcomings. Rather, even when we recognize those flaws, we can still see that a person's essential core is good and pure (Orot Yisrael 4:3).

One of my favorite insights from Ethics of the Fathers is the teaching that human beings are beloved because we were created in G-d's image (3:14). How can we not love one another? How can we not love ourselves, once we realize this?

In all likelihood, we'll keep putting ourselves and each other into boxes. As a new immigrant myself, I'm still figuring out what those boxes even are.

But maybe the goal isn't to pretend the boxes don't exist. Maybe the goal is to remember that they're ours, not G-d's.

No matter what box someone seems to fit into, that Jew is someone we're commanded to love. And no box is large enough to contain the essence of a Jewish soul.

It Takes All Kinds

RABBI YANKI TAUBER (Chabad.org)

"It takes all kinds." That, essentially is the message of the mitzvah of the "Four Kinds" — the etrog (citron), lulav (palm frond), hadas (myrtle) and aravah (willow) — over which we recite a blessing on the festival of Sukkot. In the words of the Midrash:

The etrog has both a taste and an aroma; so, too, do the people of Israel include individuals who have both Torah learning and good deeds.... The date (the fruit of the lulav) has a taste but does not have an aroma; so, too, do the people of Israel include individuals who have Torah but do not have good deeds.... The hadas has an aroma but not a taste; so, too, do the people of Israel include individuals who have good deeds but do not have Torah.... The aravah has no taste and no aroma; so, too, do the people of Israel include individuals who do not have Torah and do not have good deeds.... Says G-d: "Let them all bond together in one bundle and atone for each other."

The Lubavitcher Rebbe points out that the Midrash is not just saying that "all are part of the Jewish people" or "all are precious in the eyes of G-d" or even that "all are necessary"; it says that they "all atone for each other." This implies that each of the Four Kinds possesses something that the other

three do not, and thus "atones" and compensates for that quality's absence in the other three.

In other words, it's not just that it takes all kinds to make a people — it also takes all kinds to make a person. And Sukkot is the time when we bond with each other so that the other's qualities should rub off on ourselves.

The etrog says: "I am perfect. I balance learning and doing in flawless equilibrium. In my life, knowledge and action do not overwhelm or displace one the other, but rather fulfill and complement each other." This is something we all need to say, at least once in a while. We all need to know that we possess the potential for such harmonious perfection, and that we each have those moments in our lives when we attain it.

The lulav says: "I am utterly devoted to the pursuit of wisdom, awareness and self-knowledge. Doing is also important, but my first priority is to know G-d and (thereby) my truest self, even if this means withdrawing from involvement with the world." This is something we all need to say, at least once in a while. We all need to know that there is the potential for such consummate knowledge in us, and that we each have those moments in our lives when we attain it.

The hadas says: "What our world needs is action. Knowledge of G-d and self-awareness are worthy goals, but I have a job to do. I need to build a better world — enlightenment may have to wait." This is something we all need to say, at least once in a while. We all need to know that our mission in life is to "make the physical world a home for G-d", and that there are times when the need for action takes precedence over everything else.

The aravah says: "I have nothing. I am nothing." This is something we all need to say, at least once in a while.

Sharing Your Blanket

RABBI EFREM GOLDBERG (RabbiEfremGoldberg.org)

Israeli war hero and statesman Moshe Dayan was once stopped for speeding by a military policeman. Dayan protested: "I only have one eye. What do you want me to watch—the speedometer or the road?"

The Shulchan Aruch (634:1) teaches that the minimum size of a kosher sukkah is 7 tefachim by 7 tefachim, about 2.5 feet by 2.5 feet—less than half the size of my desk. The Mishnah Berurah explains that as long as a sukkah can fit your head, most of your body, and part of a table, it is valid.

Rav Yankele Galinsky highlights a striking contrast between Pesach and Sukkos. On Pesach we recline, stretch out, and dine like royalty. On Sukkos, however, we squeeze into fragile, temporary huts. And once we're inside, pressed against each other, that's when we invite the ushpizin—Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, and more. Not only them, but v'imach kol ushpizei ila'ei—"come one, come all, there's plenty of room." But where exactly is there room?

So much of life depends not on what we see, but on how we see. The Mishnah in Avos (5:22) teaches that Avraham Avinu lived with an ayin tova—a generous eye—while Bilam embodied an ayin ra'ah—a critical, stingy eye.

The truth is, we all carry both. At times, we see loved ones with an ayin tova, overlooking flaws, excusing quirks, and feeling close. Psychologists call this the Halo Effect. Other times, when we feel distant, we look with an ayin ra'ah, where nothing the other person does can be right.

What makes the difference? Not the size of the bed or the blanket. Not even necessarily the other person's behavior. It's our own perspective. As the Talmud (Sanhedrin 7a) says: when love is strong, a couple can sleep on the edge of a sword and still have room. When love is weak, even a ninety-foot bed feels cramped.

This is the heart of Sukkos. After the High Holidays, when we've repaired relationships and renewed our bonds, we enter our sukkah and choose to see others with an ayin tova. We give the benefit of the doubt, forgive slights, and see the good in people.

That's why on Pesach, the four sons each ask their own question and receive their own unique answer, and the four cups must be drunk separately. But on Sukkos, the four species must be taken b'agudah achas—bound together as one. Pesach highlights individuality; Sukkos highlights unity.

So will our sukkah feel cramped and claustrophobic, or spacious and welcoming? The answer doesn't lie in its square footage, the menu, or even our guests' behavior. It depends entirely on us. With an ayin tova, even a tiny sukkah feels endless. With an ayin ra'ah, even the largest sukkah feels suffocating.

The Mishnah in Avos (5:5) describes how in the Beis HaMikdash, people stood crowded, yet when bowing, there was space for all. The Chasam Sofer explains: it was objectively crowded, but no one felt restricted because of the joy and love that filled them.

Several years ago, researchers in England found that the average couple argues in their bedroom 167 times a year. What do they fight about? The survey revealed the most common disagreements: leaving a light on to read, adjusting the temperature, letting children sleep in the bed, and snoring. But the top cause of conflict? Hogging the blanket.

Howard Schultz, the Chairman and Chief Global Strategist for Starbucks, visited Israel in 2011 and wrote an article upon his return. He related an encounter that he and a number of high-powered executives had when they met with Rav Nossan Tzvi Finkel, zt"l, the former Rosh Yeshiva of the Mir.

Gentlemen, the elderly rabbi began, who can tell me the lesson of the Holocaust? The Rabbi called on one of the men who was surprised to be singled out and he began meekly, "We will never, ever forget ..." The Rabbi indicated this was not the right answer... No one wanted to be called on next. Schultz avoided eye contact with the teacher so he wouldn't be recognized. Another man spoke up saying "We should never be a victim or a bystander." The elderly Rabbi dismissed this answer as well.

At this point, Schultz said the entire group felt reduced to a group of elementary school students. Then the Rabbi responded in gentle but firm voice, "Let me tell you the essence of the human spirit. As you know, during the Holocaust, people were transported in the worst possible inhumane way, by cattle cars, convinced they were going to prisoner of war camps but ultimately they ending up in death camps. After hours and hours in the stifling crowded cattle car with no light, no bathroom, nowhere to sit, they arrived in the camps freezing cold and hungry. The doors of the rail cars were swung wide open and the people inside were blinded by the light.

Men and women were separated, mothers were torn from their daughters and fathers from their sons, and they were herded off to bunks to sleep. Only 1 person out of 6 was given a blanket. And at that moment, that person, who was fortunate enough to be handed that blanket, had a choice: am I going to push the blanket to the other five people who didn't get one or am I going to pull it toward myself to stay warm? Am I going to give or am I going to take? It was during this defining moment that we learn the power of the human spirit, when people pushed the blanket to five others." With that, the Rabbi stood up and said "take your blanket, take it home and push it to five other people."

This Sukkos, let's see our sukkah, our blanket, and our love as big enough to share with other people.

The Sukkah is the Safest Place in the House

RABBI ZECHARIA RUBIN (Aish.com)

Henderson, Nevada is beautiful. We have sunshine nearly every day of the year. The skies are almost always blue and bright. It rarely rains, but when it does, it comes in sudden, dramatic bursts. Last year, those torrential downpours came pouring down Friday night during Sukkot.

Instead of having our meal in the sukkah, we ate inside. While Jewish law said we were exempt, it was a letdown to celebrate the Shabbat meal in our home instead of in the sukkah.

That night, even after the rain stopped, the sukkah still dripped. Water seeped through the thatched roof, and reluctantly, we went to sleep inside. My boys were disappointed and I couldn't blame them. We went to bed, as our sukkah remained empty.

In the middle of the night, a loud alarm jolted us all out of bed.

My wife and I scrambled throughout the house searching for the source. It wasn't any of our fire alarms, those were quiet. The sound was coming from somewhere on the first floor, toward the back of the house.

Finally, we found it: a carbon monoxide detector my wife had bought years ago. She'd purchased it as a precaution because we have a meat smoker near the back door, and she'd thought it wise to have an extra layer of protection. At the time, it had seemed almost unnecessary.

That Sukkot night, her decision helped save our lives.

I quickly called 911 (saving a life overrides Shabbat and Yom Tov prohibitions). The firefighters arrived, confirmed that the carbon monoxide levels were dangerously high, and told us to wait outside until the house cleared.

As we stood outside under the cool desert sky, one of my sons looked at me and said with a smile on his face, "So the sukkah is actually the safest place in the house."

That’s the essence of Sukkot, isn’t it? We leave our sturdy, secure homes with their roofs and locks and alarms, and step into a fragile hut covered with branches. We remind ourselves that our true protection doesn’t come from walls of brick or steel, but from G-d Himself.

The sukkah is temporary, vulnerable and open to the elements, yet in it, we are under G-d’s shelter. Sukkot is the holiday of joy precisely because it teaches us that the deepest happiness doesn’t come from what we build, but from the trust we place in G-d.

Last year that message was brought home to us in a powerful way. Our walls, our ceilings, even our fire alarms, none of them could truly protect us. But the foresight, perhaps Heaven-sent, that led my wife to buy that carbon monoxide detector did. And as we stood outside, just a few feet from our sukkah, it was clear: the airy, flimsy, makeshift hut, susceptible to rain, bugs, and the elements was, in truth, the safest place in the house.

A Look Ahead

RABBI JAY KELMAN (TorahinMotion.com)

The history of our nation is linked with Pesach. Many of our mitzvot—mezuzah, tefillin, Shabbat, honest weights, the prohibition of charging interest—are directly related to our Egyptian experience. There is an obligation to recall the Exodus on a daily basis and to relive that event once a year at the Seder. Sukkot seems like a minor festival in comparison.

While we spend weeks if not more preparing for Pesach, Sukkot gets short shrift. With the focus on the introspective days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, our preparation tends to begin a few days beforehand. While the Shulchan Aruch notes that 30 days before Pesach we inquire and expound about the festival, the building of the Sukkah is actually the last law recorded of the laws of Yom Kippur. Only after Yom Kippur is over do we begin building our Sukkah. The supremacy of Pesach is further demonstrated by its much wider observance amongst the general community and the (often excessive) meticulousness with which the observant community prepares for the festival.

The story of the Exodus is described in great detail in the Torah; contrast that to Sukkot, where the Talmudic rabbis debate why we are actually obligated to sit in the Sukkah. Such a debate arises only because the Torah never actually makes mention of us actually dwelling in Sukkot in the desert. The only reference to Sukkot is the command of the Torah to dwell in the sukkah, with the purpose of its commemoration not clearly spelled out.

Yet in many ways, it is Sukkot that is the more significant holiday.

The holiday of Pesach is rooted in the past: “So that you will remember the day you left Egypt, all the days of your life” (Devarim 15:3). Sukkot, on the other hand, looks to the future: “So that your future generations will know that through Sukkot, I redeemed the Jewish people when I took them out of Egypt; I am the Lord your G-d” (Vayikra 23:43). While we come from a glorious past, the more important quest is to help shape an even more glorious future.

Looking forward should be the natural result of the Yamim Noraim, where our focus has been on the past, the wrongs we have committed over the course of time. Teshuva begins with acknowledging the wrongs we have done in the past, but can only be completed with the resolve to do and be better in the future. As we cannot change the past, we can only pray that our teshuva is accepted; but what will be in the future is, to a large extent, in our own hands.

It is really Egypt that was the birthplace of our nation, and the Torah reminds us over and over again that our sojourn there is meant to teach us to be sensitive to the stranger. We may have originated in Egypt, but our destination is Israel. But it is Sukkot that focuses on the land of Israel, where (thankfully) both the present and the future history of the Jewish people will be made. The Sukkah itself marks our long journey—both past and present—towards the land, and the lulav, etrog, hadas and arava celebrate the bounty of that land.

With Pesach rooted in our past, the Torah commands us to “remember” Pesach; but regarding Sukkot, our future generations must “know” the holiday. It is knowledge that gives us the power and ability to mold our future. While memory is crucial, without knowledge, memory can lead to inertia and frustration with this present that may not match our sometimes-faulty memories.

Our Talmudic sages “codified” many of the laws of chinuch, of education, in masechet (tractate) Sukkah. They were well aware that it is the education we give our children that will determine the success of our future. May we merit educating them well.

Shabby, but beautiful

Rabbi Yossy Goldman (JNS.org 22-9-26)

A man goes to his rabbi and tells him, “I’ve been miserable for years. My business is failing, my children don’t call, my knees hurt. What should I do?”

The rabbi says, “The Torah commands us to be happy on Sukkot. It’s a mitzvah.”

The man says, “Rabbi, that’s wonderful news. When’s Sukkot?”

The rabbi replies, “In six months.”

The man says, “Perfect. I’ll suffer till then.”

Well, Sukkot is almost here, so his six months are up. And it raises a real question. The Torah tells us, v’samachta b’chagecha—“you shall rejoice on your festival” (Devarim 16:14). That’s not a suggestion but a mitzvah. We are commanded to be happy.

That raises an obvious question. How exactly does one command an emotion? Happiness isn’t a light switch. It’s not something you can will into existence by decree. It rises and falls with our circumstances—a good day at work, a phone call from a child, a difficult diagnosis, a broken relationship. So how can the Torah simply legislate a feeling?

I think the answer is this: The Torah isn’t commanding us to feel happy on cue. It’s telling us that if we seek it in the right places, joy is to be found, built into the very structure of the festival and waiting for us to discover it. Sukkot doesn’t manufacture happiness out of nothing. It points us toward where real happiness actually lives.

There’s an old story about a couple in a shtetl in Eastern Europe. He was a Talmudic scholar, always buried in his books. She was the breadwinner, running a small trading business. Twice a year, there was a great fair in the nearby city, where she would buy goods wholesale and bring them home to sell at a profit. And that, essentially, was their livelihood.

One year, the fair was in the big city, and she asked her husband to come along and help her. He agreed. They arrived in the morning, and he went off to shul to pray, promising to meet her at the market the moment he finished. But once he began praying, he didn’t stop. And once he was done praying, he opened his Gemara and was gone. He became utterly absorbed in the Talmudic tome, the hours melting away—market, wife and purpose entirely forgotten.

When she found him that evening, furious, he offered her this philosophical defense. “Tell me,” he said, “why did you need me at the market?” “To help me buy the cheese and the goods.” “And then?” “Then we’ll sell them.” “And then?” “Then we’ll have money.” “And then what?” “Then we’ll buy more goods and sell them, and have more money.” “And then?”

She paused. “And then ... we’ll be happy.”

He replied: “Why do I need to buy and sell, and buy and sell, to be happy? I was happy already—there in the study hall, over the Gemara, in prayer. You want to chase happiness through the market. I already found it for free.”

The “pursuit of happiness,” when you think about it, is a strange phrase. Chase happiness directly, and it slips further away.

Happiness isn’t a destination you arrive at after enough transactions—enough money, enough acquisitions, enough achievements. It’s a byproduct. It blossoms naturally out of a life lived with meaning—a life that’s right in the eyes of G-d and right in the eyes of other people.

It shows up, uninvited but welcome, when the life underneath it is worth living.

There are countless examples of people who have all the money they could dream of, but still find joy elusive.

A wealthy husband who never spent much time with his wife discovered that she was, not surprisingly, quite miserable. When he eventually realized that she was unhappy, he asked, bewildered: “What do you want? A new house? Diamonds? Name it, and it’s yours!”

She looked at him and said, “Keep your house. Keep your diamonds. Just get me a lawyer. What I really want is a divorce.” Money, evidently, was never the problem—and it was never going to be the solution.

I think of my own grandfather’s sukkah when I was a boy. It was a patchwork of old doors and mismatched window frames, each a different color and held together more by hope than craftsmanship. By any objective measure, it was shabby. But step inside, and there was radiance, warmth—something you could feel but not quite explain. Somehow, the heavenly cover was sheltering and warming us in its embrace.

Compare that to the palaces so many of us build today—vast homes with every conceivable luxury, made of granite, marble, glass. It reflects outer

opulence, but all too often, inner poverty. A strange emptiness sits in the middle of all that comfort. Warmth doesn't scale with square footage.

I live in South Africa, and I've watched people who have next to nothing—some without even shoes—dancing, singing, toyi-toying with an unmistakable joy. No house. No money. No shoes. And yet there they are, dancing with joy.

Sukkot is called Z'man Simchatenu, the "Season of Our Rejoicing," because it teaches us exactly where joy comes from. Not the size of the sukkah, but what fills it. Not what we own, but what we live by: Shabbat, our traditions, our Torah and mitzvahs, the values handed down from a grandfather with a rickety sukkah and a scholar too absorbed in Torah to notice a marketplace.

Keep the commandments. Live a life that means something, with people and purpose. Raise your children in this spirit, and no matter what the outer trappings look like, happiness—quite naturally, without ever having to chase it—will come.

News & Views

Sept. 17, 2024 was the day Israel took back the initiative

SHIMON REFAELI (JNS.org 17-9-26)

Two years ago today, on Sept. 17, 2024, at 3:30 p.m., beeping sounds began to emerge from the pockets of thousands of Hezbollah operatives across Lebanon. Seconds later, the pagers began to explode.

In Beirut, the Bekaa Valley and other locations, communication devices that Hezbollah had adopted precisely because it believed they were safer than cellular phones were transformed, within moments, into weapons against those carrying them. The explosions continued for about an hour. The following day came the second wave: radios used by the organization also exploded. Within two days, dozens were killed and thousands were wounded, including civilians.

It was later revealed that the operation was the result of an intelligence and deception apparatus built over years, including penetration of Hezbollah's supply chain and the creation of a commercial infrastructure designed to induce Hezbollah itself to purchase the devices that had been prepared for it.

But the significance of what became known as the "Pager Operation" was not the number of casualties. It was that, at 3:30 that afternoon, the party determining the pace of the war changed.

To understand the significance of the event, one must remember where Israel stood that morning.

Nearly a year had passed since the Oct. 7, 2023 Hamas massacre. Hezbollah had opened a northern front against Israel as early as Oct. 8, 2023, repeatedly fired rockets at the Jewish state and conditioned an end to the fighting on an end to the war in Gaza. Tens of thousands of Israelis were displaced from their homes. Communities along the Lebanese border almost became ghost towns. Homes, businesses and infrastructure were damaged, and Israeli families lived for months in hotels and temporary housing.

Israel found itself in an intolerable strategic situation: A terrorist organization backed by Iran had effectively succeeded in determining that tens of thousands of Israeli citizens could not live in part of their own country.

It was no coincidence that, only hours before the explosions, the Security Cabinet officially adopted the return of northern residents to their homes as one of the objectives of the war. The defense minister said at the time that the possibility of a diplomatic arrangement was diminishing because Hezbollah refused to separate the fighting in the north from the war in Gaza.

This was the moment when Israel faced a choice far more significant than the question of how to deal with another rocket barrage.

The question was who controlled reality. For months, Hezbollah held an important strategic advantage: It chose when to fire, where to fire and how far to escalate. Israel responded, thwarted attacks, struck and destroyed targets, but as long as tens of thousands of Israelis remained outside their homes, the enemy could claim that the equation of attrition was working in its favor.

The "Pager Operation" changed that equation.

It was not a preemptive strike in the classic sense, because Israel and Hezbollah were already in the midst of fighting. It was something no less important: a return to the initiative. Instead of waiting for the enemy's next move, Israel moved first, penetrated the enemy's systems and forced it to contend with a reality it had not planned for.

The damage was physical, but the psychological and organizational damage

went even deeper.

Hezbollah discovered that it was not only its commanders, weapons depots and launchers that were exposed to Israeli intelligence. Its supply chain, communication systems and devices in the pockets of its operatives could also be under enemy control. Following the operation, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps even ordered its personnel to stop using certain communication devices and inspect their systems out of concern over similar penetration.

The initial shock inflicted on Hezbollah allowed Israel to exploit the moment of weakness and launch a series of targeted eliminations before the organization had time to recover.

On Sept. 20, 2024, Ibrahim Aqil, one of Hezbollah's senior figures and the commander of its operations system, was killed in Beirut along with additional senior members of the Radwan Force. In the days that followed, Israel expanded its air campaign against infrastructure, launchers and command centers. On Sept. 27, Hezbollah's central headquarters in the Dahiyeh was struck, and Hassan Nasrallah, the man who for more than three decades had shaped Hezbollah and turned it into Iran's most important strategic arm in the Middle East, was killed.

The "Pager Operation" alone did not defeat Hezbollah. But it was the opening blow in a sequence of operations that, within weeks, transformed Hezbollah from an organization that believed it was deterring Israel into an organization trying to save its chain of command, communication systems and leadership.

This is the first lesson of Sept. 17: Deterrence is not created by declarations. It is created when the enemy discovers that the price and risk it calculated are not the price and risk it actually faces.

For years, it was common in Israel to speak of the need to "preserve deterrence." But deterrence is not an asset deposited in a bank that earns interest. On the contrary, it erodes under the cost of inflation. It is tested anew every day. When a terrorist organization can drive tens of thousands of Israelis from their homes for months without paying a price that undermines its own sense of security, deterrence gradually disappears. Sept. 17 began to reverse that trend.

The second lesson is that excellent intelligence is worthless if there is no willingness to use it.

What was revealed after the operation shows that the success was not born overnight. According to testimony from former Mossad personnel, the penetration of Hezbollah's communications network had been built over years, while development of the pager project began as early as 2022. Companies, supply chains, products and marketing mechanisms were constructed to induce the enemy to make the purchase itself.

Moreover, a country can possess the best intelligence in the world and still lose if its leadership is afraid to turn knowledge into action. Oct. 7 taught the price of a situation in which much is known, partial warnings are issued, assessments are made, interpretations are offered, discussions are held—and then one waits.

Sept. 17 reminded us of an older and simpler Zionist principle: The role of a sovereign state is not merely to know what its enemies are planning. Its role is to take the initiative, take our fate into our own hands and thwart the enemies' plans.

The third lesson is that military success also changes diplomatic reality.

Israel is sometimes presented with an artificial choice between "force" and "diplomacy." History teaches that this is a false binary. In the Middle East, effective diplomacy often comes after the battlefield changes the incentive structure.

Until September 2024, international efforts focused on preventing escalation and achieving an arrangement that would keep Hezbollah and Israel away from a broader war. After the campaign against Hezbollah, in November 2024, the terror group agreed to a ceasefire based on U.N. Resolution 1701; the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces in the south; and the withdrawal of Hezbollah forces to the north of the Litani River. Israel made clear that it would no longer return to a reality in which security violations went unanswered.

Diplomacy did not replace force. Force created new conditions for diplomacy.

The impact extended beyond Lebanon.

When Syrian rebels launched their offensive at the end of November 2024, they encountered an Assad regime whose central pillars of support had been severely weakened. Hezbollah, which in the past had sent its best fighters to Syria to save dictator Bashar Assad and his regime, was occupied with rebuilding itself after the blows it had suffered from Israel. Iran was weaker, Russia was bogged down in Ukraine, and on Dec. 8, the Assad regime collapsed.

Sources and analyses published afterward explicitly pointed to the weakening of Hezbollah and Iran as one of the conditions that allowed the

rebels to exploit this window of opportunity.

Israel did not bring down Assad through the pagers. But it broke a critical link in the regional system that had protected him.

One of the most important expressions of this change was also evident in the international arena. After Oct. 7, Israel was perceived by the international community as a wounded country, dependent on assistance, whose actions were open to restriction. Israel, it was believed, could be repeatedly told what it was not permitted to do.

But when Israel demonstrated that it was capable of striking Hezbollah, eliminating its leadership, standing up to direct attacks from Iran and changing the regional balance through force, the starting point of the conversation with Israel changed. Israel began to be perceived as a regional power capable of shaping reality. A country whose will, capabilities and red lines had to be taken into account.

The lesson is simple: In relations between states, respect is not a substitute for diplomacy. Power is one of the conditions that enables diplomacy based on respect rather than weakness.

Two years ago, Israel reminded its enemies of something they had begun to forget: The Jewish state possesses not only the ability to defend itself when attacked, but also the intelligence, sophistication, patience and power to choose the time, place and method of doing so.

That was the great significance of the “Pager Operation”: the initiative.

Zionism was not built on the hope that our enemies would change their intentions. It was built on the decision that the Jewish people would no longer entrust their security to others.

The Jewish state cannot afford to wait again and again until a threat materializes, until the enemy chooses the timing and until the world offers yet another arrangement that no one is willing to enforce.

We must see the threat, prepare the capability, choose the moment—and act. Because in the Middle East, whoever gives up the initiative winds up handing it over to the enemy.

Trying to Prevent the Takeover of Western Civilization

MAJID RAFIZADEH (GateStoneInstitute.org 19-9-26)

What Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Donald J. Trump have been doing is not just battling terrorist groups; they have been preventing these groups from achieving their main goal: taking over Western civilization.

The core ideology of groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas and the Houthis – like the Iranian regime – is not influence, trade or partnerships; it is ideological dominance. Their efforts actually center on trying to destroy all non-Muslims, as well as other Muslims that each group considers not Muslim enough.

Doctrinally, every Muslim is committed to killing polytheists (such as Hindus) and to domination over "infidels" such as Christians and Jews – as well as the to the broader project of imposing their vision over the inferior, secular West with its man-made laws (in contrast to Islam's divine, Allah-made sharia law). Democratic institutions are an abomination to Islamists.

The Iranian Constitution itself enshrines this hegemonic ambition. Its preamble declares that the document "provides the necessary basis for ensuring the continuation of the Revolution at home and abroad." It further commits the Islamic Republic of Iran to work with other Islamic and popular movements "to prepare the way for the formation of a single world community" in accordance with the Qur'anic verse describing believers as one community under one god: Allah. The same constitution assigns Iran's army and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps not only to the defense of Iran's borders but also to "the ideological mission of jihad [war to advance the cause of Islam] in G-d's way of; that is, extending the sovereignty of G-d's law throughout the world."

Exporting the revolution is not an optional foreign-policy preference for Iran's rulers; it is an obligation.

The late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, stated, "We shall export our revolution to the whole world. Until the cry 'There is no god but Allah' resounds over the whole world, there will be struggle." That formulation leaves little room for coexistence with secular, liberal, or non-Islamic systems. The goal is not influence, trade or partnerships; it is ideological dominance.

This project has already produced concrete results beyond the Middle East. Iranian-backed networks, such as Hezbollah, have established financial, logistical, and operational footholds across Latin America. The Tri-Border Area of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay has long served as a hub for money laundering, counterfeiting, and fundraising that supplements Iranian patronage and spreads Islam among the people whose lives they promise to benefit. In Venezuela, successive regimes issued passports to individuals linked to Hezbollah, hosted training facilities, and deepened state-to-state

cooperation with Iran. Reports in recent years have noted the relocation of hundreds of Hezbollah operatives and their families into South American countries, including Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela.

Parallel activities — document fraud, collaboration with drug cartels, and the use of diplomatic cover — extend the reach of these networks toward the southern approaches of the United States. Cultural centers, media outlets, and educational programs have also sought to cultivate sympathetic audiences.

The method, which is gradual and multi-layered, begins with social and charitable work that builds local legitimacy; proceeds through cultural and religious institutions that shape narratives, and eventually produces political actors who enter state bureaucracies, legislatures and governments. Once inside, they can craft legislation, priorities for law enforcement and foreign policy goals. The Iranian revolution itself followed a comparable trajectory: years of ideological groundwork, infiltration of institutions, and then a sudden consolidation of power that few outside observers fully anticipated until it was complete. Similar patterns have been visible in Lebanon, where Hezbollah evolved from a militia into a dominant political and military force that holds veto power over the state.

Israel's military campaigns against Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Iranian military and regime assets are not merely counter-terrorism operations. They degrade the military and financial capacity of regimes whose goal is the destruction of Israel and the erosion of the societies that they control or that host them.

Trump's approach — combining maximum pressure sanctions, diplomatic isolation of Tehran, and open support for Israel's right to defend itself — has sought to deny Iran's regime the resources and international legitimacy it needs to sustain its proxy network to curtail their ability to project power and ideology across the Middle East and into North America, Latin America and Europe.

If there is no serious resistance, the same gradual process that transformed Iran into a hell for its people and hollowed out Lebanese sovereignty can take root in Western democracies. Demographic change, parallel legal systems, political entryism, and the systematic intimidation of critics create the conditions for a determined, incremental takeover. Even demographically, such a transformation becomes impossible to reverse.

The fight that Trump and Netanyahu are presently conducting is not intended only to neutralize terrorist organizations. It is trying to prevent Western civilization, democracy, and freedom from falling under the control of an extremist ideology that openly seeks their replacement.

The least that European and other Western countries can do is to support these efforts — militarily, financially and diplomatically — by refusing to disparage those countries courageously fighting to preserve their freedoms, won at the cost of so many lives, and by refusing to legitimize terror groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas and the Houthis, as well as the regime in Iran whose constitution and leaders have committed it to a global struggle until their vision prevails.

Saudi Arabia discovers the value of a strong Israel

FIAMMA NIRENSTEIN (JNS.org 17-9-26)

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who has fascinated many with his vision of modernizing the heart of Sunni Islam, is changing course.

Saudi Arabia is home to Mecca and Medina, the two holiest cities in Islam, and its immense oil reserves have made the kingdom one of the most powerful countries in the Arab world. Mohammed bin Salman has been courted by U.S. President Donald Trump and by Israel, which has long sought normalization with Riyadh.

The crown prince thought he could navigate the region's wars as he pleased. But the logic of this conflict is proving inexorable.

It is impossible to remain indifferent when Iranian missiles and drones threaten your country. And now the Houthis, the brutal Yemeni proxy of an increasingly desperate Iran, have brought the danger directly to Saudi Arabia.

Mohammed bin Salman thought he could remain outside the war. Instead, he finds himself in it up to his neck.

The Houthi offensive has exposed Saudi vulnerabilities, while attacks on the kingdom and the threat to shipping around the Bab el-Mandeb Strait have demonstrated once again the reach of Iran and its proxies. Riyadh is looking for help. (Reuters)

The lesson for Mohammed bin Salman should be clear: Alliances matter most when allies are prepared to confront a common enemy.

Only last month, Saudi Arabia signed the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement with Turkey and Pakistan. The pact provides that an armed attack against one of the three countries will be considered an attack against them all.

It sounded impressive. Reality has proved more complicated.

Turkey has no desire to be drawn into a confrontation with Iran, while

Pakistan has sent mixed signals about what the agreement actually requires. Islamabad initially indicated that continued Houthi aggression could activate the pact, but later said that no military response had been discussed. And Pakistan is far away.

The stakes extend far beyond Saudi Arabia. Through its proxies, Iran has now extended its reach to another of the world's strategic maritime choke points. Bab el-Mandeb is the gateway to the Red Sea and, ultimately, the Suez Canal—a vital artery of trade between Europe and Asia. Houthi control of the strait therefore threatens not only Riyadh but Egypt, Europe and global commerce.

That also helps explain Mohammed bin Salman's turn to Egypt. Cairo has an enormous economic interest in keeping the Red Sea route open and traffic flowing through the Suez Canal. The Saudi crown prince traveled there this week seeking support from Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi as the Houthi attacks intensified.

Saudi Arabia has also sought assistance from other allies as its missile-defense resources come under pressure. The United States continues to provide intelligence cooperation while stopping short of direct military intervention.

And then there is Israel.

Israel does not disappear when circumstances become difficult. It is not going anywhere. And Saudi Arabia and Israel face the same enemies: Iran and the Houthis.

Reports now suggest that Riyadh has sought Israeli intelligence assistance through U.S. Central Command as it confronts the growing Houthi threat. That is significant.

Mohammed bin Salman has spent years dangling the possibility of relations with Israel, always conditionally and often ambiguously. But reality is stronger than diplomatic games.

On one side are Iran and its proxies. On the other are countries with a common interest in stopping them.

The Houthis have advanced along Yemen's Red Sea coast and threatened the Bab el-Mandeb, one of the world's most important maritime chokepoints. Saudi Arabia said this week that it intercepted a Houthi drone near Mecca, although the Houthis denied targeting the holy city.

They have demonstrated that there are few limits to their ambitions.

Mecca and Medina are threatened. The Red Sea is threatened. International shipping is threatened. And Jerusalem has long been in the sights of Iran and its proxies.

Mohammed bin Salman is discovering something that should have been obvious all along: Geography, common interests and common enemies are ultimately more powerful than diplomatic maneuvering.

When Iran and the Houthis threaten the region and its stability, Saudi Arabia must decide whom it can actually count on.

Riyadh is drawing closer to Israel again because, in a dangerous region, strength commands respect—and Israel has shown that it's willing to use it against its enemies.

The ICC Sacrificed Its Credibility to Target Israel

Lt.-Col. (res.) Maurice Hirsch (jcfa.org 8-9-26)

The International Criminal Court (ICC) is imploding. While many factors have contributed to the court's failure, the final nail in the coffin is a direct result of the court's decision to cut its nose to spite its face.

The implosion of the ICC is, to a great extent, a direct result of the sanctions imposed on the court by the U.S. administration and its commitment to dismantling it.

The ICC is not a conventional court. It does not have automatic international jurisdiction. Rather, it depends on states joining the court, an act that, in practice, partially delegates a state's authority to prosecute defined crimes to the court.

The question that then arises is whether the ICC has jurisdiction when soldiers or officials of a non-member country carry out activities and operations in the territory of a member state. For example, does the ICC have jurisdiction over U.S. soldiers and officials – even though the U.S. is not a member of the ICC – for actions they carried out in Afghanistan, which is a member of the ICC?

From the outset, the U.S. understood that the ICC intended to claim jurisdiction based on the territorial/geographical boundaries of member states, and that this could potentially subject U.S. servicemen and officials who operated in those states to the court's purported jurisdiction.

Responding to the perceived threat, the U.S. passed the American Service Members' Protection Act in 2002. Colloquially dubbed the "Hague Invasion Act," the law empowered the President to "use all means necessary and appropriate to bring about the release of any person... detained or imprisoned by, on behalf of, or at the request of the International Criminal Court."

According to the Rome Statute, the ICC's foundational document, the court is meant to invoke its jurisdiction only when the relevant state is "unwilling or unable genuinely to carry out the investigation or prosecution."

With full knowledge of the U.S. position regarding the court's general jurisdiction over U.S. personnel, and while it would be almost impossible for the court to determine that the U.S. is unwilling or unable to investigate and prosecute potential offenders, the ICC decided to open an investigation of alleged crimes by U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

So why does the ICC not simply close the investigation against the U.S. servicemen and officials?

The answer, as it is all too often with the ICC, is its obsession with persecuting the Jews.

IN ITS INITIAL STAGES, Israel was one of the driving forces behind establishing the court. However, it soon became clear that the court had become irrevocably politicized and would be used as nothing more than another weapon and forum of lawfare against the Jewish state. As a result, Israel, similar to the U.S., never joined the ICC.

The non-existent "State of Palestine," on the other hand, did join the ICC in 2014. From the moment it was admitted, "Palestine" repeatedly and relentlessly urged the court to open investigations against Israeli servicemen and officials for crimes that were alleged to have been committed in "Palestine."

The problem, however, was that an independent "State of Palestine" never existed in the past, nor does it exist today. Thus, in the absence of any clear geographical area that could be called "Palestine," the ICC prosecutor asked the court to define the "the territorial scope of this jurisdiction."

In practice, to persecute the Jews, the ICC prosecutor was asking the court to act ultra vires and make a decision not only to invent the non-existent "State of Palestine," but also to set its borders, for the first time in history.

The ICC jumped at the opportunity, recognized the fictitious state and decided, in direct contradiction of fact and law, that the "borders" of the new state were the Armistice Lines, drawn between Israel and its hostile neighbors – Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria – in 1949.

Pursuant to that decision, the now disgraced and fired ICC prosecutor, Karim Khan, opened an additional investigation against Israeli officials, and even requested that the court issue arrest warrants. The court acted as requested.

In reality, everyone knows that the U.S. will do its utmost to prevent the ICC from proceeding against any U.S. serviceman or official, and any such proceeding is, objectively, highly unlikely.

The U.S. has made this position crystal clear, repeatedly, through both the President and former and present Secretaries of State Mike Pompeo and Marco Rubio. In a series of decisions, the U.S. imposed differing sanctions on both the court and its officials.

The ICC and its sanctioned officials also unequivocally know that the court will never prosecute a U.S. serviceman or official. But they have a problem.

If they accept the U.S. position that precludes jurisdiction over officials from non-member states, it would have to accept the same argument concerning Israel, and the claim the Israelis had committed alleged offenses in the "State of Palestine."

If the court accepts the claim that the U.S., a Western, law-abiding democracy, is both willing and able to investigate and prosecute potential offenders, it would have to accept the same claim with regard to Israel.

Instead of focusing its limited resources to investigate real offenses that were committed in countries that actually exist, the ICC is hell-bent on committing institutional suicide, simply as a means to persecute the Jewish country. Instead of targeting real offenders, the ICC is wasting its time, resources, and finances, pandering to the political whims of those who seek to punish law-abiding countries engaged, within the restrictions and limitations of international humanitarian law, in the war against terror.

The ICC could and should have been a formidable and important international institution. Sadly, it is just another monkey court betraying its potentially lofty goals.

Israeli chess teams forfeit matches after FIDE 'breaches' Yom Kippur understanding

JNS STAFF (JNS.org 22-9-26)

Israel's men's and women's chess teams pulled out of their sixth-round matches against the Netherlands and Bulgaria at the 46th FIDE Chess Olympiad in Samarkand, Uzbekistan that were scheduled to take place on Monday, after both opponents declined requests to change the date, which fell on Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar.

The International Chess Federation (FIDE) "breached" its commitment and forced the Israeli teams to miss the games on Yom Kippur, the Israel Chess Federation said in a Hebrew-language statement on Sunday.

"In an official letter sent to the Israel Chess Federation, FIDE undertook to

ensure that the games involving the two Israeli teams on Sept. 20 would conclude by 5 p.m., and that the games on Sept. 21 would begin no earlier than 7:30 p.m., after the end of Yom Kippur,” the Israeli association said. “In practice, the games were not adjusted in accordance with this commitment, and both teams—the men’s and women’s—were required to play during Yom Kippur,” the chess body continued. “Out of respect for the holy day and for the players representing the teams, Israel did not show up for the games, and both teams were recorded as having suffered technical losses without points,” it added.

The Israel Chess Federation went on to say that it will demand explanations from FIDE and seek to remedy the “sporting injustice” caused to Israel’s teams.

The statement further attached a letter issued by FIDE on Jan. 15 that confirmed that the schedule of the Israeli teams in the Olympiad would be adjusted to accommodate for Yom Kippur.

According to Ynet, the agreement to adjust the matches’ hours was not incorporated into the competition regulations, leaving the decision to alter the timings with the respective national teams playing against the Israeli teams.

Contrary to the Dutch and Bulgarian teams, the Colombian and Singaporean teams agreed to start their matches against Israel early on Sunday—before the start of Yom Kippur—enabling these matches to go ahead as originally agreed, the report added.

The Israeli teams were recorded a technical 0-4 loss to the Netherlands and Bulgaria due to their decision not to show up.

Kosher & Halacha Korner

The following article may be at variance to local Kashrus Agencies. When in doubt, contact your local reputable Agency. In Australia, direct any questions to info@kosher.org.au or visit www.kosher.org.au

Undercover: The Halachos of Schach

RABBI MOSHE HEINEMANN (Star-K.org)

When our Torah speaks about the Festival of Sukkos it states, “Chag HaSukkos Taaseh Lecha B’Aspecha Migornecha U’Miyikvecha.”¹ “The Sukkos holiday should be observed at the time that you harvest your grain and your wine,” during the fall. Our Chachamim, sages, have taught us that this pasuk has another esoteric meaning. The sukkah, in which we dwell during this chag, should be made from the unused parts of the harvesting grain and wine, namely the stalks of grain and twigs of the vine. These are the items that should be used for the schach, the covering, which is placed on top of the sukkah instead of a permanent roof.

Our Rabbis have further taught that this directive, pesoles goren v’yekev, includes other items that are similar to stalks and twigs that are no longer attached to the ground and cannot become ritually impure, tamei. Unfinished wood slats, corn stalks, and palm branches are popular varieties that satisfy the criteria for schach.

Many natural materials are not qualified to be used for schach. Leather is a natural product that does not grow from the ground; neither do cement nor natural materials such as metal. None of these may be used for schach. All types of foods are not kosher material for schach. Included in this halachah are grain husks that have some grains remaining in the husks. Wood products that are cut and shaped into vessels, utensils, or equipment that is tubular, would not qualify as schach because these products can become tamei. Furthermore, even if the wood vessels were to be broken and unfit for their original use, and can no longer become tamei, they remain disqualified.

Although hollow, bent wooden pipes would not be kosher for schach, hollow bamboo poles would be kosher because they grow hollow naturally, and were not fashioned by anyone with the intention of putting things into their opening. Similarly, straight wooden pipes without indentations would be kosher, as well as wooden beams, even those with imperfections in the wood. However, the custom is not to use them.

Stems that are used for schach must be in their original state and cannot be subject to further processing. For example, wood is kosher while paper is not. Flax stems are kosher but flax rope is not. Cotton wool, which has been combed out and no longer resembles the natural cotton plant, would no longer qualify as schach.

Flax rope is problematic for another reason. According to Rashi, if the linen fibers were twisted into threads and braided into rope, they are posul min HaTorah. The Torah disqualifies them as it does any other woven material.

Branches of a tree cannot be used for schach if the branches are still connected to their original source. If the branch was still connected to the tree while covering the sukkah and was then cut down, the branch would still be disqualified, unless a person lifted the branch and then replaced it on the sukkah with the intention of using the branch for schach. Our Rabbis have taught us that schach that has an unpleasant odor should preferably not be used. Use of schach that has a pervasive foul smell is forbidden. Kosher schach has to remain fresh throughout the entire chag. Branches with leaves that will dry out during Sukkos, or vines that will shrivel, are disqualified and are not kosher even while the leaves are still fresh.

Kosher schach material must be placed on top of the sukkah with the intention of being used for schach. One cannot place kosher schach material on top of the sukkah with the intention of drying the material, and then change his mind in the course of the drying process and use it for schach. To this end, the halachah forbids the use of bundled schach if it is generally subject to drying. Moreover, our Rabbis forbade the use of this bundled kosher schach, even if it was intended for schach. This restriction applies to bundles of 25 sticks or more that are tied in the middle or at both ends.

How wide can the boards be in order to qualify as kosher schach? One may use boards that are less than 4 tefachim (14”) wide. Even if wider boards would be set on their sides, these boards would not be kosher. It is the custom not to use narrower finished wood planks generally used in construction.

As was stated previously, the criteria for schach is three fold: 1) items that grow from the ground, 2) items that are no longer attached to the ground, and 3) items that cannot become tamei. Reeds, straw, or wooden slats that are woven into mats would not qualify as schach if they were woven for the purpose of sitting or sleeping upon, as well as any other specific function. However, if they were made expressly for schach, these mats would be kosher.

Are bamboo mats that are held together with other materials, such as string or yarn, kosher? HaRav Moshe Feinstein, zt”l, ruled that venetian blinds that were made out of wooden slats and held together with cloth tape, which is mekabel tumah, are not kosher. Even if the tape was removed, the slats remain non-kosher and disqualified for use as schach. Based on Rav Moshe’s reasoning, even if a mat was manufactured for no specific reason, since the slats were held together by cloth tape, the mats would be considered an item that is mekabel tumah and could not, halachically, be used for schach. Mats held together with braided nylon filament thread would be disqualified for the same reason, since according to Rashi they are considered to be woven. However, monofilament line would not be disqualified for this reason, because a monofilament line merely holds the slats together and is not woven. Therefore, if the wooden mats were made for schach using monofilament line, the mats would be kosher.²

A kosher monofilament mat must be placed on the sukkah in the proper manner. The following guidelines must be followed: The bamboo slats should be placed perpendicular to the beams and walls upon which they rest. In other words, if the monofilament line (which does not qualify as schach) is supporting the slats, the mat has been placed down improperly. One may not suspend schach with non-schach material. Furthermore, schach mats must not be anchored with string to prevent the mat from blowing away in a normal wind (a ruach metzuya). For the same reason string, which is an improper schach material, cannot be used for anchoring. Instead, a kosher wooden beam may be placed across the mat in order to hold it down.

Can kosher mats contain more than 25 slats, or would the mat be considered a bundle (chavila)? Since the mat does not need to be dried, it may contain more than 25 slats without qualifying as a bundle.

There is a rabbinical question as to whether one can support the schach with something that is not kosher for use as schach. Therefore, one should not support the schach with anything that can become tamei, i.e. metal rods or pipes. Also, one cannot use metal to weigh down the schach so that it will not blow off with an ordinary wind. One may, however, hold down the support with something that is not kosher for use as schach. If the schach is supported by wooden beams, which are used to strengthen the schach to prevent it from blowing away in an unusual wind, then nails or string may be used as a support to the beams.

How much schach should be used to cover the sukkah? The amount required is determined by the amount necessary to shade the sukkah. The schach must be dense enough so that there should not be more sunlight

than shade. However, it cannot be so dense that the rain would not be able to fall into the sukkah.

We have just mentioned some of the dinim of schach. There are many more halachos, however, this article does not allow for a more elaborate discussion. In case of questions a halachic authority should be consulted.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu should help us to properly fulfill the mitzvah of sukkah, so that we may merit to see with our own eyes His tabernacle of peace spread over the entire Jewish nation and Yerushalayim.

1. Devarim 16:13

2. In Hilchos Sukkah (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 629:1) it is written that schach cannot consist of something that is “mekabel tumah.” It is for this reason that bamboo carpet mats cannot be used for schach. In addition, l’chatchilla, kosher schach may not be supported by anything which is mekabel tumah (see Rama, O.C. 629:7). According to the opinion of Rashi (as brought in Shaar Hatziyun 629:20), spun or woven threads (e.g. string, yarn) are mekabel tumah. Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt”l, states (Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:177) based on a Mishna, if something which is mekabel tumah is used to hold wooden slats together, the slats themselves are also mekabel tumah and are no longer kosher for schach use. Therefore, Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt”l, explains that wooden venetian blinds held together with something woven are not kosher for schach. It follows that according to Rashi, bamboo slats held together by multi-filament cord (i.e. it is braided or twisted) are also not kosher schach (even if they are not made to sit or walk on).

Shabbos Sukkos

OU KOSHER (OUTorah.org)

QUESTION: This year, the first day of Sukkos is Shabbos, and there is no mitzvah of lulav and esrog. Can I show my neighbor my beautiful esrog, or is it muktza?

ANSWER: Shulchan Aruch (OC 658:2) writes that a lulav is muktzah on Shabbos. Since there is no mitzvah of lulav and esrog on Shabbos, a lulav serves no purpose, and it is muktzah like other tree branches. However, an esrog may be moved, since it has a function; one may smell the fruit. (There is a dispute if the beracha on fragrances is recited when smelling an esrog on Sukkos, since the primary function of an esrog on Sukkos is for the mitzvah of lulav and esrog and not for fragrance. To avoid the uncertainty of reciting a beracha, the Shulchan Aruch recommends not smelling an esrog on Sukkos. Nonetheless the Mishnah Berurah (658:5) writes there is no restriction to smell an esrog on Shabbos and recite a beracha, because there is no mitzvah on that day.) Since, it has a function, it is not muktzah, and it may be moved for any purpose. However, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l (Shmiras Shabbos K’Hilchaso 22: note 62) writes that today, since people are protective of their esrogim and will not pass them around to be smelled, they are categorized as “muktza machmas chisaron kis” (expensive or delicate items that are generally stored in a safe location), which may not be moved for any reason on Shabbos. The Aruch Hashulchan (OC 308:17) appears to rule this way as well.

QUESTION: This year, the first day of Sukkos is Shabbos. Are we required to eat Shalosh Seudos on Sukkos?

ANSWER: Yes. The requirement to eat three meals on Shabbos applies even when Yom Tov falls on Shabbos. In truth, it may be challenging to eat Shalosh Seudos at the proper time. The halacha states that one should not begin a meal within three hours of sunset prior to Yom Tov, so that the evening Yom Tov meal will be consumed with an appetite. (Three hours is measured as sho’os zemanus, where the length of each hour fluctuates with the length of the day. On Sukkos, the day is about 12 hours long, and the three hours are almost precise.) This year, Motza’ei Shabbos is the beginning of the second day of Yom Tov, and it may be difficult to eat two meals between the end of Musaf and the three hours before sunset. Nonetheless, the Mishnah Berurah (529:8) writes that if one did not eat Shalosh Seudos before the cutoff time, Shalosh Seudos should be consumed until sunset. This is because the mitzvah to eat Shalosh Seudos outweighs the honor of Yom Tov. To avoid this problem and fit everything into the limited time frame, some split the Shabbos meal into two. The first part of the meal is eaten, followed by benching and a short break. After that, the meal is resumed with hamotzi and the final courses, making certain to begin more than three hours before sunset.

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