

Hoshana Rabba, Lulav and Arava

- Rav Soloveitchik Shiur in Boston, 1969, on Sukkot, Hoshana Rabba, Lulav and Arava

HOSHANA RABBA SHIUR OF RABBI J.B. SOLOVEITCHIK BOSTON, 1969 Transcribed and summarized by Rabbi Dr. Nisson E. Shulman

I. The Torah commanded that within the precincts of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem the lulav and esrog should be taken on each of the 7 days of Sukkos. Beyond the Temple precincts it was taken in hand only on the first day. The source is Vayikra 23:40, "Ulekachtem lachem bayom harishon pri etz hadar... usemakhtem lifney hashem elokechem shivas yamim." While the lulav commandment seems to apply to the first day alone, our sages interpreted the command of simcha to mean by means of the lulav and esrog. Hence, that commandment was applied to each of the seven days. In the same way, the arava was taken in hand within the Holy Temple on each of the holiday's seven days, but outside its precincts it was taken only on the seventh day. The source of the arava commandment is the oral tradition (that does not diminish from its authority as a Torah commandment). In the Beis HaMikdash there was special significance to taking the lulav on the first day and the arava on the seventh day, for only on those days did these respective mitzvot take precedence over the Shabbos. Thus, if Shabbos coincided with the first day, the lulav would be taken in hand. If it coincided with the seventh day, the mitzvah of arava applied. On the other days of the holiday, Shabbos took precedence over both of these mitzvot.

II. The reasoning regarding lulav is obvious, for only on that day were both commands operative, "ulekachtem" and "usemachtem." Thereafter, only the "usemachtem" commandment remained. We do not know why the arava took precedence over the Shabbos on the seventh day (See Sukkah 42b). In the Temple, the commandment of arava was fulfilled in two ways. They would decorate the altar with long aravos, which were so tall that their tops waved over it. At that time they would blow "hatzotzros," the trumpets. They would also, on each day of Sukkos, after fulfilling the mitzvah of the lulav and esrog, put them away and take the arava. We will later discuss what they did with the arava.

III. When the Holy Temple was destroyed, Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai decreed that these commandments should remain operative in remembrance, but with this difference, the lulav was maintained for each day of Sukkos except for Shabbos, and the arava applied only on Hoshana Rabba. On Hoshana Rabba, besides decorating the altar, might they also have taken the arava in hand while marching around it seven times? Otherwise, how can we consider the arava a remembrance of the Temple? What possible commemoration can there be for the decoration of the altar? However, if in the Beis HaMikdash we had marched around the altar with the arava as well, then by our marching around the Sefer Torah on the bima today, we do, indeed, reflect the practice in the Temple. [It appears that arava on Hoshana Rabba was considered an even more important performance than the commandment of blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, for the Talmud discusses organizing the calendar in such a way that Hoshana Rabba does not fall on Shabbos (See Sukkah 43b). It has no such discussion in connection with the shofar, which is not blown when Shabbat comes out on Rosh Hashanah. We do not know why Hoshana Rabba has so much prominence.] Rav Yoseph (Sukkah 43b) questions the premise that today arava on Hoshana Rabba is in commemoration of the practice in the Beis HaMikdash, for that could only

be true if arava in the Mikdash was taken in hand (netilah), and with it we marched around the altar. Rav Yoseph holds, however, that all they did in the Mikdash was beautify the altar by means of arava but did not march around the altar with it. Thus our custom of arava on the seventh day has nothing to do with the Beis HaMikdash since there is no longer any altar. As Rashi says; Vehashta deleka mizbeach, heicha nizkefa?" Abaye questions Rav Yoseph's statement by quoting the Mishnah that they would walk around the altar once every day and seven times on Hoshana Rabba. "Was it not with the arava (in hand)?" This is refuted: "No, the marching around the altar was with the lulav in hand." The Talmud quotes a controversy on this issue, and concludes that they walked around the altar holding the arava. The Talmud cites an incident that took place in the Holy Temple. Dissident followers of Baitus who objected in principle to the oral tradition, tried to sabotage a Shabbos Hoshana Rabba service by burying the aravos which had been prepared from erev Shabbos under stones which on Shabbos are "muktzeh." Ordinary Jews came the next day, disregarded the prohibition of muktzeh, drew the aravos out from under the stones, and practiced "hibut arava." If the practice of arava was limited to decorating the altar (zekefa) alone, the beraita would not have used the term "hibut arava" which means either shaking or banging. (According to Rashi, the arava was waved in precisely the same fashion as the lulav. It is the Rambam who interprets "hibut" as "banging"). So the opinion of those who claimed that the hakafot were with the lulav in hand and without the arava is rejected. Arava remains with a dual aspect, "zekifa," decorating the altar, and "netila," taking the arava in hand and with it marching around the altar.

IV. Rambam, Ch. VII Hilchot Lulav, Halakhah 20-22, has a slightly different view than that described above. He cites the Oral Tradition that in the Mikdash they brought an additional arava besides the one bound with the lulav, and describes how the mitzvah was accomplished. Each of the seven days they would bring branches of arava and stand them up around the altar with their tops bending over it. And while they brought these willow branches, they would blow tekiah, teruah, tekiah (with "hatzotzros,"). Blowing the trumpets in this fashion made it clear that arava was a fulfillment of a mitzvah (a "kiyum") rooted in the Mikdash itself. In effect, it was a mitzvah that the altar be decorated with aravos, for they blew the "hatzotzros" for those procedures dependent on the Mikdash, such as when they opened and shut the Mikdash gates. Whenever the fulfillment of the mitzvah is related to the sanctuary itself, it required the "hatzotzros." That is why, when they removed the aravos, they would say, "Yofi lecha mizbeach," How beautiful (this practice is for) the altar. If arava were a mitzvah incumbent upon the persona (kiyum gavra), then each person would have to approach the altar and erect an arava. But that was not the way it took place. The priests used to do it on behalf of everyone, for the Halakhah was that the altar had to be decorated with aravos. When the Rambam describes the practice on those occasions when Shabbos coincided with Hoshana Rabba, however, he mentions two procedures: the erection of the arava decoration around the mizbeach, and the taking of the arava in hand; "ubaim haam venotim mimenu kederech sheosim bechol yom." So apparently the Rambam agrees that there are two "kiyumim" to arava, one relating to the altar, that it be decorated with arava, the other relating to each person requiring him to hold an arava. Yet, when describing the daily practice, he indicates that they marched around the altar with their lulavim rather than with the arava (ibid. 23). Moreover, the Rambam assumes the hakafah must be part of Hallel, since they recited "ana hashem hoshiah na;" this could only apply to lulav. How do you explain this apparent contradiction to the Gemara above? The discussion in the Gemara seems to have rejected this view, holding that every day there was "hakafa" with the arava, not only on

Hoshana Rabba. How does the Rambam explain this? Apparently the Rambam held that even though there is a personal requirement (kiyum gavra) of "netilat arava," taking it in hand, this is not fulfilled by "hakafah," making a circuit around the altar. It consists rather of moving the arava, or smiting it ("nanuim" or "hibut") (See 22). Our practice on Hoshana Rabba of striking the arava on the floor (bench) or wall is, according to the Rambam, exactly what they did in the Beis HaMikdash. Just as we smite the arava on the wall or floor without a bracha on Hoshana Rabba, in the Beis HaMikdash they used to do this every day of the holiday. Thus, while according to Rashi, arava in the Temple was waved and held as we marched around the altar, and this is an extension of "netila," according to Rambam "hibut," smiting the arava, is the extension of "netilah." He derives this from the beraita's use of the word "hibut" "She'eyn baytusim modim shehibut haarava doche Shabbat." So, according to Rambam, the circuit of the altar was done only with the lulav, and never with the arava.

V. Why is the Rambam so insistent about this? If you take the "hakafah" and relegate it to the arava, as Rashi does, then it turns out that arava has two communal "kiyumim" deriving from the altar: 1) that the altar be decorated with arava; 2) that the altar has a procession around it by means of the arava. The lulav is left with only one "kiyum gavra," the personal obligation of "netila," that of taking the lulav (4 minim) in hand, reciting a bracha and moving or waving it. The Rambam agrees that there is a dual aspect of the commandment of arava: one is a "kiyum mizbeach," a communal requirement dependent on the altar, the second is a personal responsibility, a "kiyum gavra." The "kiyum mizbeach" is that it be decorated by means of arava; the second is the personal responsibility of "hibut," that every person take an arava and strike it two or three times on the floor or on the wall. According to the Rambam there were two aspects of the mitzvah of lulav as well: 1) the individual's requirement to hold the lulav in his hand for each of the seven days (and outside the Temple for the first day), and 2) the communal requirement, the "kiyum mizbeach" that on all seven days the altar be decorated with lulav, not by standing the lulavim up around the altar (as in the case of arava), but by means of a parade around the altar holding the lulav. For the arava, the medium of beautification of the altar is to erect them around it; for the lulav the medium is to make a circuit of the altar, holding the lulav in hand. This is not our individual duty, but a requirement of the altar and could therefore be performed by the priests on our behalf. It would seem, according to this then, that the mitzvah of "usemachtem" branches out, becoming - after the first day of Sukkos - a communal duty expressed by the lulav parade around the altar.

VI. Today, we practice hakafah every day of Sukkos by walking around the bima upon which a Sefer Torah is held, making one circuit daily and seven on Hoshana Rabba. The Rambam stresses the custom today of circling the "tevah" and thereby means the Sefer Torah which it contained, so that the "tevah" represents the altar (ibid. 23). According to Rashi, the whole institution of hakafot on days other than Hoshana Rabba makes no sense, because, according to his view, in Temple times there were no hakafot with the lulav, but only with the arava! Furthermore, the mitzvah of the arava is limited to the seventh day, so why should there be any hakafot altogether on the other days? According to Rambam, however, it is logical. Circling makes sense on every day of Sukkos since it is not related to the arava but to the lulav with which - in the Temple - they would circle the altar on each day of the holiday. Thus, according to the Rambam, circling with the arava is not done on any other day of Sukkos. The lulav parade each day of Sukkos today is in remembrance of the Temple. On Hoshana Rabba the situation

changes, for there is then zecher leMikdash, not only by means of lulav, but by means of arava as well; lulav all the seven days, the arava on Hoshana Rabba, its exclusive day.

VII. On Hoshana Rabba we seek to accommodate both views, that of Rambam and that of Rashi. We circle with the lulav, for according to Rambam, besides the personal obligation of "netilah," taking the lulav, there is a communal obligation that the altar have a parade around it just like on every other day of Sukkos. As far as the mitzvah of arava is concerned, that is fulfilled with "hibut," striking the arava. Rashi, who holds that the circuit on every other day of Sukkos is with the arava, applies that to Hoshana Rabba as well, as a communal responsibility deriving from the altar. He also holds that the arava on Hoshana Rabba is also a personal obligation, fulfilled with "netila." Both Rashi and Rambam agree that on Hoshana Rabba there are seven circuits of the altar. Rabbi Moses Isserles (Rama) therefore says that on Hoshana Rabba you pick up the arava together with the lulav. The Ari HaKadosh, however, maintains that for reasons rooted in Kabbalah one should not take the lulav and the arava at the same time. That is why on Hoshana Rabba we don't pick up the arava until we have put away the lulav. The four items of the mitzvah, lulav, arava, esrog, hadas, represent the complete name of Hashem of four letters, the Yod, He, Vav and He. This is expressed in the Yehi Ratzon, "Bring nigh each to the other and they should be as One in my hand." This name of G-d represents mercy, loving-kindness, "Hashem Hashem, Kel rachum vechanun." The arava is "din." That is why the arava should not be held together with the four varieties. (Rav Moshe Soloveitchik and Rav Chaim did, indeed, hold the lulav together with the arava).

VIII. There are a number of rulings in the Mikdash that are reflected in current practice. For instance, a mourner does not participate in the hakafot. Some achronim question why a mourner should not participate since he is required to fulfill all commandments. The Gaon explains that it is because hakafah is a mitzvat mizbeach, a communal obligation regarding the mizbeach, and an avel does not send karbanot, and has no access to the mizbeach. The Mishnah clearly indicates that in the Beis HaMikdash, Hoshana Rabba was the most outstanding day of Sukkos, particularly in relation to the arava. We do not know why this is so, although the Zohar elaborates about Hoshana Rabba in Parshat Noach and Parshat Pinhas. The Ramban, too, in Bamidbar (Shelach), in connection with the spies, on the passage "His protection was removed from them," indicates that the night of Hoshana Rabba is the last chance to influence our "gezar din," the final decree issued on Yom Kippur. Ramban therefore calls the night of erev Hoshana Rabba "leil hahatima;" no change in our "gezar din" can be made thereafter. We do not know why the Talmud is silent about this element of Hoshana Rabba. But we do see that on Hoshana Rabba the ceremonial procedure changed in the Beis HaMikdash, and intensified seven-fold.