

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

TALMUDIC METHODOLOGY

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Shiur #21: Is Sukka One Mitzva Made up of Separate Acts?

The majority of *mitzvot aseï* are “instantaneous” activities, such as lifting a *lulav* or eating *matza*. The fulfillment of these *mitzvot* does not extend over a time period (although they may be performed more rapidly or less rapidly). These *mitzvot* often regenerate themselves; for example, the instantaneous mitzva of *lulav* is regenerated each day of Sukkot. (Of course, this regeneration of this *chiyuv* only occurs within the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*; outside of the *Mikdash*, the seven day mitzva is only Rabbinic.)

Other *mitzvot* span durations of time. These are elastic *mitzvot* that are performed over an extended period, whether short or long. A classic example of this model of mitzva is *tefillin*, which are worn over a time period. The entire time span of wearing *tefillin* constitutes one mitzva (which regenerates on a daily basis). Similarly, *talmud Torah* is incumbent upon a person on a daily basis. Presumably, the experience of studying Torah constitutes one extended mitzva. Likewise, a well known position of the *Geonim* suggests that counting the *Omer* is considered one long “experience,” despite the isolated nature of each act of counting. Counting days – by definition – can only occur in 24 hour intervals, but the entire experience of counting is one incorporated process.

Which category does the mitzva of sitting in a *sukka* belong to? Does this mitzva obligate at least seven different, isolated acts, or does it constitute one “extended” mitzva performance stretched across seven days? Inasmuch as the mitzva mandates residing, eating, sleeping, and recreating in the *sukka*, it may constitute one long continuum, rather than a series of independent activities.

This appears to be subject to a debate between Shmuel and R. Yochanan cited by the *gemara* in *Sukka* (45b). The former claimed that only **one** *berakha* should be recited all seven days of *sukka* residence because all seven days are deemed “*chad yoma arikhta*,” one long day. Evidently, Shmuel viewed the entire

sukka mitzva experience as one mitzva, despite the obvious interruptions when leaving the *sukka*.

R. Yochanan argues and obligates a different *berakha* every time a person enters a *sukka* anew. Does he argue with the fundamental assumption and render the mitzva of *sukka* as multiple *mitzvot*? Or does he agree in principle that *sukka* is one long obligation, but despite this continuum a new ***berakha*** is necessary each time the *sukka* is re-engaged? Multiple *berakhot* may be recited even though only **one** mitzva is being fulfilled. R. Yochanan's language is ambiguous and supports either position.

It appears, however, that R. Yochanan adopts the latter approach, since the *gemara* (46) compares *sukka* to *tefillin*. As noted above, *tefillin* is the prototypical example of one extended mitzva. As the *gemara* acknowledges, the *berakha* is recited every time *tefillin* is re-applied, even though the same mitzva is being revisited. Evidently, *berakhot* are recited every time a person engages in a mitzva anew, even if he is engaging in the same mitzva.

The Ritva adopts this approach, as does a very interesting Tosafot in *Berakhot* (11a), which questions the difference between *sukka* and *talmud Torah*. Presumably, extended residence in a *sukka* constitutes one long mitzva in the same way that extended Torah study entails one (daily) mitzva. Yet every reentry into the *sukka* is accompanied by a new *berakha*, while re-engaging with Torah study does not obligate a new *berakha*. To resolve this, Tosafot essentially claim that Torah study is not **interrupted** by non-Torah interactions in the way that departing a *sukka* truncates the mitzva. Since Torah study is partially mental and behavioral, it can extend even when a person is not actively studying Torah. *Sukka*, in contrast, is purely mechanical, and absence from the *sukka* completely interrupts the mitzva. Ultimately, Tosafot maintain the fundamental similarity between the mitzva of *sukka* and the mitzva of Torah study, but differentiate between the two based on the level of interruption, and consequently the obligation to recite a new *berakha*. Fundamentally, they agree with the Ritva that despite multiple *berakhot*, *sukka* remains one long extended mitzva even according to R. Yochanan.

An interesting comment of R. Yosef Engel in his *Gilyonei Hashas*, further solidifies the notion that *sukka* is one long, extended mitzva, despite periodical departures. The Torah demands that a *sukka* be considered a home, in the spirit of "*teishvu ke-ein taduru*." As explained in a different *shiur* [[Teishvu Ke-Ein Taduru – Fashioning a Sukka like a Residence](#)], this requirement is primarily geared toward the

level of experience within the *sukka*; it should be as comfortable as a residential experience. R. Engel asserted that the *sukka*-residence comparison can also **exempt** a person from *sukka* experience, just as a person often departs from his home. Ironically, by periodically departing from a *sukka*, one assures that the *sukka* resembles his residence! Departing from the *sukka* is part of the overall treatment of a *sukka* as a home.

Based on this view the mitzva may be so uninterrupted that the question of reciting a new *berakha* upon reentry can be challenged according to R. Engel. Unlike removing *tefillin*, which effectively **severs** a person from the mitzva and therefore launches a new *berakha*, departing from a *sukka* does not fully disengage a person from the *sukka* and therefore should not trigger a new *berakha*. Despite the concerns of a regenerated *berakha* obligation, however, it is clear that R. Engel would more likely define the seven day residence in a *sukka* as one long mitzva; even the departures do not interrupt the mitzva experience.

It is possible that this question regarding the nature of the mitzva of *sukka* was the subject of an interesting debate between R. Eliezer and the *Chakhamim* regarding a *sukka* built during Sukkot. R. Eliezer disqualified any *sukka* that was not built before Sukkot, since it was not a *sukka* capable of facilitating a seven day residence in the *sukka*. Presumably, he defines the mitzva as one long continued experience, and he requires one *sukka* to enable that experience. In fact, an associated position of R. Eliezer supports this notion: a person should not relocate from one *sukka* to a different *sukka*, but should rather reside within the same *sukka* all seven days. Evidently, the mitzva is one long experience (with timely interruptions) and it must be performed in one constant *sukka*.

Further indication that R. Eliezer viewed the mitzva as one long process may stem from two ancillary positions that he takes. First, he claims that the *sukka* must be owned by the person performing the mitzva, in the same manner that the four *minim* must be owned (on the first day). Although he bases this requirement upon a *gezeirat ha-katuv*, it might be based upon the notion that the entire *sukka* experience is integrated. By definition, residence in someone else's *sukka* cannot be integrated with other *sukka* experiences; since he can be denied residence by his host, this experience is isolated from his residence in his own *sukka*. Even if he were to reside all seven days in his host's *sukka*, it would not represent an incorporated experience, since his residence can be discontinued at any point.

A second indication that R. Eliezer views the mitzva as one incorporated experience stems from a *hava amina* he proposes that a person who converts to Judaism during Sukkot should be exempt from the mitzva. (Ultimately, the convert is obligated based on an extra word [*ha-ezrach*] used to describe the mitzva of *sukka*.) This *hava amina* clearly assumes that the seven days entail one extended mitzva and cannot be engaged in mid-stream. Perhaps the *hava amina* suggests, a convert can't engage in the mitzva since he wasn't obligated in it when the seven day period began.

An interesting parallel to the question of a *ger* emerges from a *gemara* in *Arakhin* (3b) that questions whether *Kohanim* are obligated in the mitzva of *sukka*. Since they are "on call" for *Mikdash* duty, they are not able to conduct marital relationships every night of Sukkot. This inability may represent a flaw in converting a *sukka* into a residential experience. Perhaps they should thus be excluded from the mitzva.

The *gemara* responds that even though they may be exempt during evenings that they are "on call," they are not exempt during the other evenings, when they can be with their wives. Strangely, the *gemara* assumes that *sukka* is an "all or nothing" proposition; if the *Kohanim* cannot engage in a comprehensive experience, they might be exempt even from a partial experience! This is reminiscent of the *hava amina* that a *ger* should be excused from joining the *sukka* experience in the middle. Ultimately, both the *ger* and the *Kohanim* are obligated to perform partial *sukka* residence, but the very discussion suggests that – at least according to R. Eliezer – the entire process is one integrated experience.

The *Rabbanan* disagree with R. Eliezer and allow relocation to a different *sukka*, as well as building a new *sukka* in the middle of the *chag*. Once again, their position is unclear. Do they disagree fundamentally with R. Eliezer and define the mitzva as comprised of separate "units," so that there is no requirement to execute each separate mitzva in the same *sukka*? Or do they agree that the mitzva entails one extended experience, but disagree regarding whether this integrated experience must be performed within one common *sukka*? Perhaps if **one** person experiences the mitzva within different *sukkot*, the entire duration is still considered one incorporated *sukka* residence.