



JewishTimes

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**COVID'S
DIVINE
MESSAGE?**

WHAT IS GOD?

WHAT CAN WE KNOW?

AFTERLIFE?

WHAT IS IT?

**WHAT IS
SUCCOS
ABOUT?**

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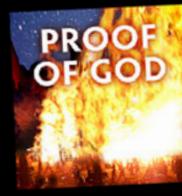
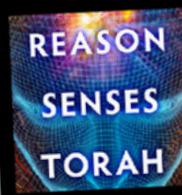
MISSION
God's Revelation at Mt. Sinai: One Plan for Mankind
The greatest event ever witnessed forces one conclusion

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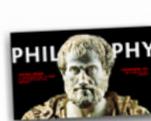
EVIDENCE EXISTS for only one event of God revealing His religion to man. All other religions claim divine origin, yet provide no validation. This explains their requirement of "blind faith," which is absent in Judaism: a religion offering proof. 3332 years ago upon Mt. Sinai, God gave us His Bible: the only time God communicated a religion to man. Masses witnessed this, which is the only validation of any historical claim, and why the major religions accept the Bible. Mesora's mission is to share God's Biblical religion with all who seek it. As every human descends from that first couple; all humans are equals. Jews boasting "Jewish Superiority" and those who discriminate against any race violate the Bible and reason. Nearing a quarter century, Mesora helps others realize God's will for us all, sharing the beauty of Biblical wisdom. Search our 1000s of original essays, publications and audio, and write us with your questions. God determined the Jew's role is to share Torah's history, wisdom, laws and moral code with all mankind. As God created all mankind, He loves each person equally. As science has defined laws, God's will for man also has defined laws and principles, and they delight the soul. The greatest minds spent their lives studying God through Torah and science, as they found nothing that compared to its enjoyment. Let us humble ourselves before Moses, Kings David and Solomon, Maimonides, Aristotle, Newton and Einstein who taught that a life of wisdom is the most fulfilling life. We too can partake of this pleasurable existence.

THOUGHT
FUNDAMENTALS

"WHAT IS UNDETECTED BY THE SENSES, REASON OR TORAH, MUST NOT BE ACCEPTED AS TRUTH." MAIMONIDES



FEATURED
CONTENT



CHARACTER
PERFECTION

"PERFECTION" REFERS TO ONE WHOSE VALUES AND ACTIONS COMPLY WITH TORAH PERSONALITIES AND LAWS: THE MOST PLEASANT LIFE.



KINDNESS

As equals, all humans must fully treat others as we wish to be treated. Charity, kindness and justice demand we rise above personal or selfish emotions and recognize that God made others as He made ourselves. Doing so creates harmony, and earns His kindness to us.



RACISM: A LIE

Mankind descends from Adam. Black and white twins unveil the lie of racism. Bible denounces it: Moses' wife was black, our kings married Egyptians and Messiah descends from a Moabite. "Better is the day of Ahab" (1Kgs 16:31). Birth doesn't define us, but how

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THE JOURNAL ON JEWISH THOUGHT

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Every reasonable man ought to distinguish in his mind and thought all the things that he accepts as trustworthy, and say: "This I accept as trustworthy because of tradition, and this because of sense-perception, and this on grounds of reason." Anyone who accepts as trustworthy anything that is not of these three species, of him it is said, "The simple believes everything" (Prov. 14:15).

MAIMONIDES
"Letter to Marseilles"

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Afterlife

READER: What are the Jewish concepts of life after death?

RABBI: Judaism, as well as other philosophies, agree that death is a physical occurrence, one which does not effect our metaphysical element, our soul. A soul is not physical, and is not effected by physical death.

If one leads a life in search of truth, meaning the ideals of the Torah and facts about the universe, the soul will achieve a state of continued involvement in the world of ideas, which is eternal: the afterlife. Conversely, one who leads a purely physical hedonistic existence will not—according to Maimonides—have any existence once deceased. Maimonides wrote: (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

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The World to Come there is neither body nor physicality, only the souls of the righteous divested of body as are the ministering angels. Inasmuch as it harbors no concrete forms there is no need there for eating, drinking, or other of the bodily necessities of the sons of man in this world; neither will any of the many things which happen to bodies in this world come to pass there, as, for instance, sitting down, standing up, sleep, death, sadness, mirth or the like. Thus did the ancient sages say, "In the World to Come there is no eating, no drinking, and no family life, except that the righteous are sitting, graced with crowns upon their heads, and indulge in feasting upon the luminousness of the Shekinah (God's presence)." (Laws of Repentance 8:2)

This is a metaphor: the righteous will be merited by their learning (crowns) which brought them to the point of having such appreciation for knowledge, that they will continue in this enjoyment (enjoying God's wisdom) in the afterlife. This is the ultimate reward, the continued state of the perception of ideas.

Knowledge is the most enjoyable pursuit. If one delves into study, he will eventually see this is so, and he will enjoy the pursuit of wisdom for its own sake, and not with the ulterior motive of securing the afterlife.

Seeking the afterlife as a separate goal from seeking wisdom is an error. For the afterlife is only attained by one who values knowledge and thirsts for it for its own sake; he does not anticipate some ultimate imagined reward (the afterlife). Once one sees that ideas are enjoyable for their own sake with no other motive, he will not seek the afterlife as something different from wisdom, but as a higher level of engagement in wisdom. Thus, only one who values wisdom has the proper concept of the afterlife, as far as man can conceive.

The pursuit of knowledge for its own sake is man's purpose. But if pursuing knowledge doesn't lead to valuing it for itself, it is worthless. Knowledge benefits man beyond all else, as it benefits man's central component: his soul. As one partakes of what is true, he learns God's wisdom and delights in refreshing discoveries daily. The afterlife is a continuation of this enjoyable pursuit. But if one imagines the afterlife as some mysterious reward for learning and Torah observance, he elevates a blank imagination as greater than learning. His learning isn't for the learning itself. Had the person realized the good which pursuing knowledge offers, he would be content to study for its beauty alone, without an ulterior motive. This involvement in learning for its own sake would offer this person an eternity of happiness. And as he became more interested in the world of ideas through learning, he would cleave more and more to it, abandoning all other pursuits. Since the afterlife is metaphysical (purely wisdom), this person will naturally be in a state of bliss after death. If on the other hand, one only learns as he assumes an imagined reward to follow, he will be sorely disappointed at the end of days. As he imagined the afterlife to be that which it is not.

For one to enjoy the next world, he must enjoy this world in the pursuit of God's wisdom. But learning as a means will not yield an appreciation of wisdom. Only a life lived out of a pure desire for truth will improve one's soul to the level where he can enjoy the afterlife. If one does not enjoy the pursuit of wisdom, but only does so in order to achieve the afterlife, he

may not achieve it. The afterlife, by definition, is an involvement in wisdom to a much higher degree, as our bodies won't exist as a vale between us and God, and His wisdom. One who seeks the afterlife and believes it to be something other than an existence of perceiving wisdom, has an incorrect view of the afterlife. He is seeking that which does not exist. He belittles the life of Torah, as he views Torah as only a means for some other imagined reward. If his learning was not for learning itself—Torah Lishma—he cannot achieve that high degree of the afterlife, which is an experience of wisdom in proportion to our level. ■

What is God?

Moses asked this of God. God told him "Man cannot know Me while alive" (Exod. 33:20). But Moses knew that God existed. So did Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Leah, Rachel and all wise people. What can we know about God?

As our prayers state, we refer to God as the creator of the universe. He is not an "energy" in the universe, for energy is physical, and is also a creation; that's 2 proofs that God isn't energy. God is also not "in" the universe, since before the universe was created, God existed. Thus, He exists separate from the physical universe, and therefore He does not occupy space or location.

God is not physical. He has no place. We cannot know what He is. But we know He is the cause of all that exists, and that means there is no other power; He is the "only" cause for everything that exists. All Egypt's gods were inanimate and silent, blow after blow during the 10 Plagues. All peoples' gods were, and are silent; no people ever claimed their stone, metal or ivory idols communicated with them.

All existences require God's will to continue existing. It is not that once God created something, that it now has independent existence. Not so. Even after God created you, you continue to exist only if He wills you to continue.

From God's Torah, we learn that God is perfectly just, that He knows all, every person's actions and thoughts. We learn that God punishes man for his sins, and rewards those that are close to Him; He saved the Jews from Pharaoh. God is merciful, as He canceled His planned destruction of Nineveh (Book of Jonah) when those Assyrians repented wholeheartedly.

We know that God favors charity and righteousness, as these were Abraham's traits which God praised (Gen. 18:19). God also records Rebecca running to serve Eliezer.

What is God? He is the cause of the universe, who is not physical, who is not "in" the world, and who designed the earth for man's benefit. He is the cause of everything who wishes man to have the most enjoyable existence through engaging in wisdom and proper morality. We don't know why God created what He did, but we can know what He created, and what His will is for mankind. We can appreciate the great potential we each have due to God's kindness and His will that we possess a soul, and intellect, that can find the greatest enjoyment in the pursuit of His wisdom, as seen in Torah and in the universe. God is the existence that we must praise and thank. ■

Sacred Slumber

RABBI REUVEN MANN

The holiday of Sukkot is a very festive time. It is described in the prayers as the “season of our joy.” In ancient agricultural Israel, this was the time when the produce was harvested from the fields. It is only natural to rejoice when we enjoy the fruits of the work of our hands.

The theme of celebration finds expression in the observance of Simchat Torah, which is done on the last day of the chag (holiday). On that day, we sing and dance with the Torah for hours on end. The message is that, on the highest level, Judaism extols the service of love. Thus, our most exalted form of divine worship, study of G-d’s Torah, should produce in us feelings of exaltation.

The most fundamental mitzvah of this festival is that of the sukkah, a simple hut with a meager roof made of wood or branches, called schach. On the surface, this mitzvah seems like an easy one to perform. Most people believe that all they need to do is to go outside and have a pleasant meal with family and friends in the sukkah. However, this is not the complete story.

While it is true that one is obligated to take one’s meals in this temporary dwelling, that is not the sum total of the commandment. The verse states, “In sukkot shall you dwell 7 days.” The Rabbis interpret this to mean that one must establish residence in the sukkah and must use it for all the activities he would normally do in his home. The two most significant expressions of residence are taking one’s meals and sleeping. Thus, according to halacha (Jewish law), one is obligated to sleep in the sukkah to perform the mitzvah properly.

While virtually everyone eats in the sukkah, only the very meticulous actually sleep there. My own experience shows that one cannot get the full impact of the sukkah without lodging there. On one level, the sukkah is intended to diminish our material excesses. We clutter our dwellings with many things we don’t truly need. The sparsely furnished sukkah drives home the point that happiness is a state of the soul. When we attain an inner sense of satisfaction, we do not need that many “things” to make us happy.

There is another dimension to this mitzvah. The activity of sleeping has great psychological significance. We are very particular about our nocturnal comforts and conveniences. There is also the element of security. We can’t relax unless all the doors are locked and the alarm has been set. In leaving the house to slumber in his humble booth, a person relinquishes his most intimate comforts and his belief that security can only come from physical protections. In the sukkah, one experiences a certain closeness to G-d by placing his wellbeing completely in His hands.

The question arises, can a person serve Hashem and earn reward even while he is asleep? The Rambam says that a truly religious person organizes every aspect of his life in accordance with how it fits in to his overarching objective: perfection of the soul. Everything he does such as working and eating and exercising is calculated to enhance his ability to elevate himself through study and good deeds. Such a person is regarded as serving Hashem while he is engaged in the most mundane activities and even when he is sleeping. Thus overnighting in the sukkah transforms one’s mundane sleep into a profound manifestation of Avodat Hashem ie. “sacred slumber.”

Sukkot lasts for 7 days and is followed by Shemini Atzeret, when we exit the sukkah and return to our homes. According to Maimonides, that is because our joy cannot be complete while living in flimsy huts. We thus see that the Torah does not want us to lead a deprived, ascetic existence. Humans need basic comforts and, as the Rabbis say, a pleasant home affords a certain mental expansiveness.

Why then does G-d command us to reside in the sukkah? In my opinion, this unique dwelling effectuates a spiritual transformation that enables one to put vital matters in perspective. The sukkah dweller learns that material comforts are not an end in themselves, but only the means one uses to achieve his true purpose, the perfection of the soul through a relationship with Hashem. Shabbat Shalom v’Chag Sameach. ■



COVID'S DIVINE MESSAGE? A TELLING DESIGN

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Maimonides was an undisputed Torah giant. He quoted Moses' Torah (Bible) when discussing pandemics: "They aren't natural, but divine punishments. Ignoring their divine warning will generate even worse catastrophes." Thus, through COVID-19, God intends to educate mankind. But where in this plague are the clues to our sins? Every race has been infected. We also see that most children are unaffected. A core truth is unavoidable: every member of mankind is an identical biological organism. This is certainly sensible, as we all descend from a single couple. Now, take the next step: If we are all identical biologically, do we also all share the same psychology? It appears so: we all prefer happiness and pleasure over sadness and pain. We all have a sense of fairness and justice, and we view kindness as better than hate. We have affection for those with whom we see more often. And intellectually, we all agree $2+2=4$ and we realize proof outweighs mere belief. In all matters—biologically, psychologically, morally, philosophically and intellectually—all humans share one design. COVID exposes our identical natures. This truth exposes multiple religions as problematic. Religions intend to provide man with a blueprint for

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happiness. Religions even claim their religions are of divine origin, and they further claim “their” religion is the true religion. But as all races share the identical design, we all would benefit equally from the identical religion. This is similar to all races be treated identically for cancer: racial differences don’t determine different treatments.

The question then is proving which religion is truly of divine origin: a question of validating historical claims. Does any religion offer anything more than an individual’s claim of divine communication? If a person today claimed that God spoke to him and gave him a new religion, would we be correct to abandon our lifestyle and accept the word of a single person, who might be delusional? Well, this is primarily what most religions claim. No religion aside from Judaism claims mass witnesses of a divine event. An intelligent person should not blindly accept anything, regardless of the masses that follow blind faiths: mass followers do not equate to mass witnesses. We accept as 100% true that Caesar and Alexander existed, and at certain times. We accept that Aristotle existed. The same about Pharaoh. A unanimous communication of witnessed events validates a history. But there is no history of masses witnessing a divine event, other than what the Bible records. Therefore, we accept as historical fact the 10 Plagues, the splitting of the Reed Sea, and God’s communication of Torah to the Jews at Mt. Sinai 3333 years ago.

God communicated a single religion, because there exists a single mankind. God did not give multiple religions. And no religion offers validation of their claims, no religion except Judaism.

God is exposing our identical biological nature through COVID, and He also exposes the fallacy of multiple religions. There is only one mankind. We will all benefit equally from the only religion God gave man.

Perhaps this also explains why children are mostly unaffected: children have not yet made the free will error of following a man made, unvalidated religion. COVID’s message does not apply to innocent children.

We are so careful to take care of our bodies not to contract COVID. But God didn’t create man to simply live biologically. He also gave mankind an intellect. God’s plan is that man distinguish himself from the animal kingdom by engaging that intellect. We should be equally careful when selecting a religion. For it is only through a correct selection that we will attain the happiness God’s Bible teaches we can attain, and through which we secure the afterlife. If we don’t seriously consider the purpose of our brief lives, we forfeit the most grand opportunity God wishes we each receive. We lose the most fulfilling life here, and an eternity afterwards. ■

We are so careful to take care of our bodies not to contract COVID. But God didn’t create man to simply live biologically. He also gave mankind an intellect. God’s plan is that man distinguish himself from the animal kingdom by engaging that intellect. We should be equally careful when selecting a religion.

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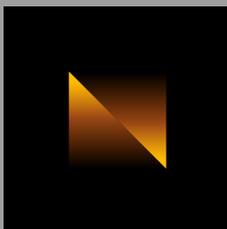
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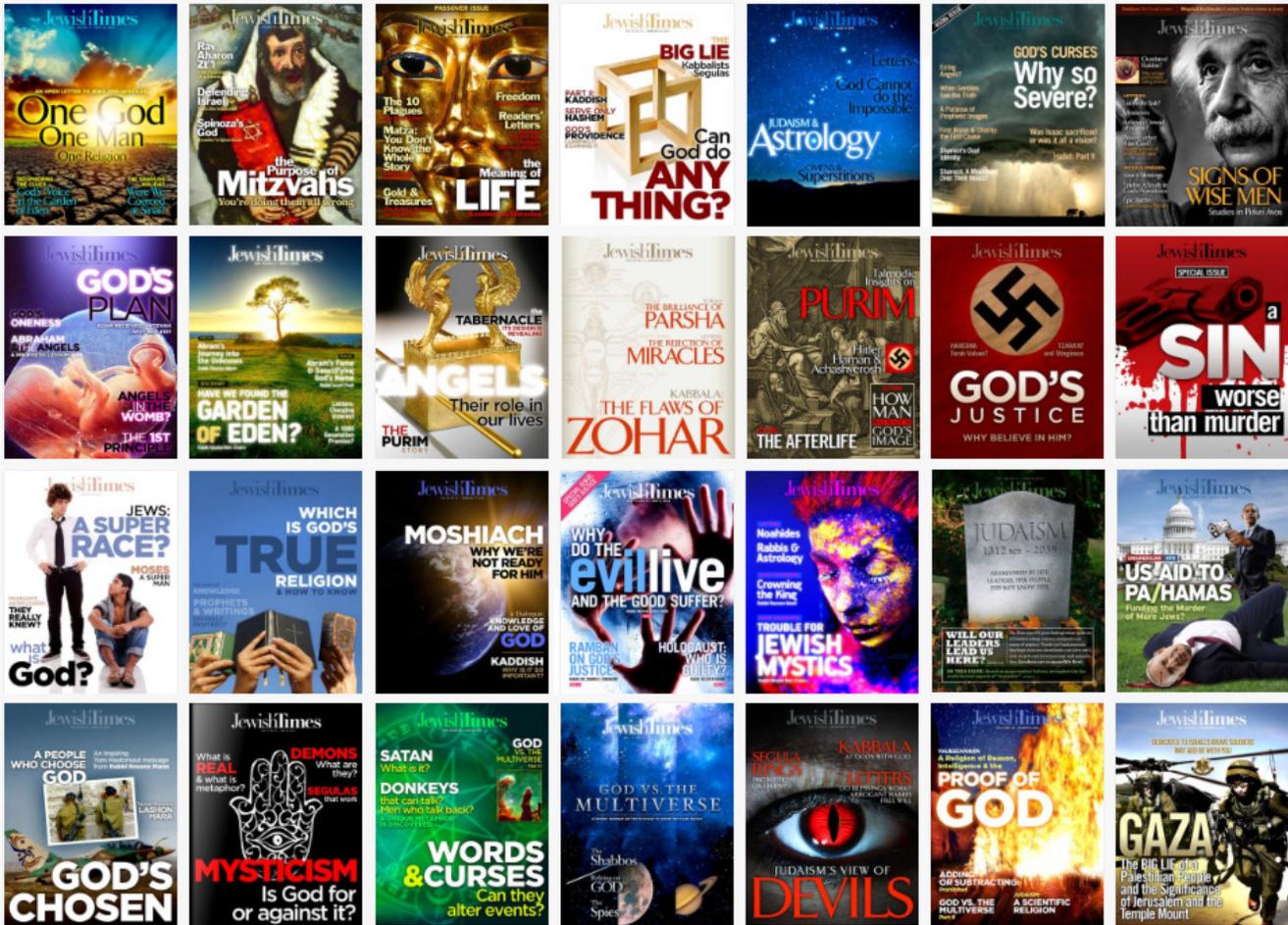
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JewishTimes

Lulav & Huts: A Connection?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

READER: Can you please explain the relationship of the lulav and etrog to the succah? On most holidays, there is usually a relationship between the mitzvos and the holiday like matzoh on Pesach, or the succah and Succos. So what is the purpose of the lulav and etrog? I am finding it very hard to find any information. Of the many people I have spoken to, little information is known. The main response I get is, “We do it because we are commanded to by God.” Well, this of course is a given, but I find this response problematic.

RABBI: In his book entitled Horeb^[1], Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explained a close relationship between the succah, etrog and lulav. I will mention his ideas, followed by my thoughts, stimulated by Rabbi Hirsch.

The Succah, a minimalistic structure, is to break man away from his materialistic lifestyle: the physical world is not the goal of our temporal earthly existence. The 4 species embodies the correct attitude towards the source of all physical good. We give thanks to God for His bountiful harvest: waving produce in all 4 directions, upwards and downwards, we demonstrate that God alone has complete dominion over the world.

The Talmud states, (Succah 37b):

Why do we wave the Lulav? R. Yochanan said, “We wave out and back (horizontally) to the One who owns all four directions on Earth, and we wave the Lulav up and down to the One Who owns heaven and Earth.”

Rabbi Yochanan separates the two acts of waving “forward/back/left/right” from “up/down” to teach us that there are two areas of God's dominion which require our affirmation. God is the sole Creator of all. This is why we wave up and down, referring to heaven and Earth: all creation is contained in these two spheres. But if up and down covers all creation, what is left to recognize about God's greatness, as we wave in 4 directions too (forward/back/left/right)? This refers not to creation, but to God's government of mankind: God has complete

knowledge/governance of man's travels on Earth (our actions) as alluded to by these “4 directions,” which is limited to earthly activity. This subtle difference points us to the realization that there are two distinct areas in which we must attest to God's greatness: 1) God is omnipotent, He can do all, as He created heaven and Earth (waving up/down), 2) God is omniscient, He knows all, as He is aware of all our travels and actions (forward/back/left/right).

This theme is reiterated as the two main themes of the High Holiday prayers, Malchyos (omnipotence), and Zichronos (omniscience). Rabbi Yochanan's view is that waving the four species on Succos must demonstrate God's dominion in all areas: His creation, and His government of man. We wave His creations up and down to demonstrate that He created all that is above, and all that is below. But He also governs all that He created, demonstrated by waving the species in all 4 directions. God's omnipotence and omniscience is again displayed in the Temple: the Menora possesses 7 branches (7=creation) and a table of 12 showbreads displays God's providence (food) over the 12 Tribes.

Why must the Succah be temporal and frail by design? Man sustains his false attempts to compensate for physical insecurity by striving for riches and earthly permanence, expressed in building luxurious homes. Succah breaks man away from his desire for physical security. Man must view God as his security, instead of viewing himself as the sole cause of his fortune. With his attachment to physical security, man removes God from the equation and fails to appreciate His vital role. Therefore, God commands us to dwell in a flimsy structure for a week, as a detachment from our greatest physical security: our homes. God must retain central focus.

Lulav complements succah by emphasizing the use of the physical for the right reasons. We thank God—the Source of our bounty—replacing our faulty view of the physical with proper thanks to God for providing vegetation. All physical objects that we are fortunate to receive should be used in recognition of the Creator of

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SUCCOS

these fruits, and not to reaffirm our own physical strength.

It also makes sense that Succah—not Lulav—is used to demonstrate man’s required break from the physical. Man’s home is the one object which embodies earthy permanence...not so man’s food. Therefore, I believe a frail home (succah) is used as opposed to fruits, which are consumed objects, and do not afford man the satisfaction of permanence. Since man does not attach himself to fruits as he does his home, the home is from where man must make his break. Succah breaks down man’s weighty attachment to the physical, while lulav redirects man’s attachment towards God, the source of all our sustenance. This is the connection.

This explains why we read Koheles (Ecclesiastes) on Succos. In this philosophical masterpiece, King Solomon presents the correct philosophy for man in relation to God, labor, wealth, happiness, death, ego, accomplishments and myriads of attitudes and philosophies. Numerous times King Solomon states, “What extra is there for man in all his toil that he toils under the sun?” He even commences his work with his summary, “Futility of futilities.” The Rabbis questioned King Solomon’s statement, “How can King Solomon say all is futile, when God said in Genesis that the world is very good?” The answer is that King Solomon only critiqued the physical as an ends in itself. When God said it was good, He meant that as long as it serves only as a “means” to man’s pursuit of wisdom and a perfected life. There is no contradiction between King Solomon and God (Rabbi Israel Chait).

Fulfill the obligations of this Succos holiday. Adhere to the commands of eating, drinking, and certainly sleeping in the succah, even light naps. Make the scach (succah covering) from detached plant life such as reeds, wood, or bamboo, so you may gaze through the gaps at the stars as you lie on your bed, recognizing your Creator, the sole Creator of the universe. Wave the 4 species in all horizontal directions demonstrating God’s exclusive dominion over all man’s affairs. Wave them upwards and downwards, demonstrating God’s exclusive creation of that which is up and down—heaven and Earth.

By living in these frail booths, may we strip ourselves of our false security, and may our waving of the lulav, esrog, haddasim and aravos redirect our security towards the One who provides a bountiful life, thereby realizing that our ultimate protection and security comes from God. ■

[1] Soncino Press, 6th English Edition 1997, pp 132

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