YESHIVAT HAR ETZION VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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UPDATES AND SPECIAL MAILINGS

LULAV AND ARAVA

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Enumerated in the mishna at the beginning of the fourth chapter of Sukka are the various additional mitzvot which pertain to Sukkot, aside from the one for which the festival is named. Two of these - lulav and arava - are grouped together in the mishna and share certain characteristics: they are both mitzvot specific to the day, are both performed with the four species (or a part thereof), and both are mitzvot which involve an act of lifting (netila).

Despite their similarities, however, we can discern several differences as well:

a. According to Biblical law, the lulav is taken in the Temple all seven days and outside it on only one, while arava is not prescribed at all outside the Temple, even though it too is in effect all seven days in the Temple.

b. Rabbinically, lulav is prescribed outside the Temple for seven days but arava only one (as discussed in Sukka 44a).

c. Not only the timing but also the authority of their respective obligations differs. While lulav is a full-fledged rabbinic obligation outside the Temple, stemming from an enactment of R. Yochanan ben Zakkai, there is a lack of consensus among the amoraim in the gemara regarding whether the arava in such circumstances is an institution of the prophets ("yissud nevi'im") or a custom that arose in the days of the prophets ("minhag nevi'im"). We conclude that it is a minhag nevi'im, and as such, we do not make a blessing, as is concurrent with practices that only have a status of minhag.

Arising from these points is a clear distinction between the obligation of arava outside the Temple, and the obligation of lulav outside the Temple. Unlike lulav outside the Temple, which is mandatory, whether by Torah law (on the first day) or rabbinic (the other six days), arava outside the Temple is prescribed neither biblically nor rabbinically, except as a mere minhag which is applicable for only one day.

To all this can be added the statement of Rabbenu Tam that arava does not even share in the full status of minhag. The Rishonim disagree as to whether one must say a blessing on a minhag. Even Rabbenu Tam, who differs from Rambam, maintaining that a minhag does require a blessing, excludes arava which is a mere shaking ("tiltul be'alma") and thus is of a lower status than that of other minhagim.

In order to understand those peculiarities, we must analyze the mitzva of arava within the Temple.

How was the mitzva of arava fulfilled? There was a place below Jerusalem called Motza. They went down to there and gathered large willow branches, and came and stood them upright along the sides of the altar with their tips bent over the top of the altar. They blew teki'a, teru'a, teki'a.

(Mishna Sukka 4:5)

It appears from this that the mitzva of arava is not an obligation upon an individual, a "chovat gavra", which is fulfilled through the action of he who takes the arava. Rather, the fulfillment relates to the Temple: there is a requirement to place willow branches upright alongside the altar, as praise and decoration. The focus, then, is on the altar and not on the person.

However, we must continue to analyze the picture suggested by an examination of the sugyot.

The gemara (43b) deals with the question of whether the mitzva of arava lies only in standing it upright (zekifa) on the side of the altar, or also in the actual taking of it (netila). If arava does have a mitzva of netila then there is certainly room to say that there is a personal fulfillment achieved by the act of taking, just as there is in lulav. However, this would all depend upon one's understanding of the mitzva of netila. At the beginning of the sugya, the gemara equates the netila of arava with the netila of lulav, but further on, the gemara tries to prove that there is a fulfillment of the netila of the arava from the circling of the altar (hakafa), and it is apparently in this hakafa that the gemara sees the fulfillment of the netila of arava. If the fulfillment of the netila is in the hakafa of the altar, then one must still see the essential fulfillment of the mitzva as relating to the altar. That is, the fulfillment that is centered on the altar is not just a function of its being decorated with branches of willow but also in its becoming a focal point around which people circle.

It would seem that this question is repeated in an amoraic disagreement. Resh Lakish opines that Kohanim barred from Temple service nevertheless enter between the hall (the entrance to the Hekhal) and the altar (from where they are generally prohibited) in order to fulfill their obligation of hakafa. To this responds R. Yochanan: "Who said it [the mitzva] is with netila - it might be with zekifa; who said it is with those [Kohanim] with physical defects - it might be with sound ones." Resh Lakish's words - that they enter there in order to fulfill it - imply that there is a personal obligation in this mitzva, and that is why we allow those Kohanim to enter where it is normally prohibited, for they have an individual obligation to perform. Thus, Rashi defines this disagreement as relating to whether there is an obligation incumbent upon each individual or solely a requirement that the altar be decorated, which can be accomplished by a single Kohen. Similarly, Rashi lines up the two opinions on either side of the netila versus zekifa question; Resh Lakish, for whom there is a mitzva of netila, holds that there is likewise an individual obligation, while R. Yochanan regards only zekifa as a mitzva which is fulfilled at the altar, for which the services of no more than one Kohen would be sufficient.

According to Rashi, then, the opinion which states that there is a mitzva of netila would also maintain that there exists an individual fulfillment thereof, similar to lulav.

Tosafot there disagree with Rashi's assessment and categorize R. Yochanan's statement as merely a hypothesis ("im timtzei lomar"). In their opinion, R. Yochanan states that even according to those who claim that the mitzva is one of netila, this is not incumbent upon every individual to fulfill, but rather, is directed only to Kohanim who are fit for Temple service. Thus, according to Tosafot, both R. Yochanan and Resh Lakish agree that the mitzva relates to the altar as part of the Temple service. Ritva explicitly formulates this approach: "Perhaps it [the netila] is like other forms of ritual service which are given only to fit ones and not unfit ones."

Tosafot point out that the whole sugya implies that the Kohanim alone did the hakafa, and the netila was incumbent only upon them, and it is patently clear that Israelites did neither netila nor hakafa. Ritva writes in disagreement that Israelites did do netila in their section of the Temple, though they did not enter to surround the altar. Rambam holds similarly that there is a mitzva of netila even without hakafa (for he rules that hakafa was done with the lulav). Thus he rules that "the whole nation" did netila. So too, it is written in the Yalkut that all Israel, old and young, did hakafa, and this is cited by Ra'avia as well (based on the Sefer Yerushalmi).

Our question then, revolves around this disagreement of the rishonim. For the Ritva and the Rambam, who believe that there can be netila even without hakafa, there is a personal obligation to take the arava, which is incumbent upon all Israel. Hakafa, according to Ritva, was limited to Kohanim because Israelites simply could not enter. Moreover, even when netila is seen as obligatory for everyone, hakafa may be of a different nature, as seen in the disagreement of R. Yochanan and Resh Lakish.

Conversely, for Tosafot, who maintain that only Kohanim did hakafa and netila (for the two go together, as the words of R. Yochanan are most easily understood), even netila is not a personal obligation, but rather a function of the altar.

It should be added that according to Abba Shaul (34a), arava is derived from the verse, "You shall take for yourselves" which is said regarding lulav, and is not learned from a separate halacha leMoshe miSinai. If so, it appears that for him, too, there was a mitzva of netila. Indeed, even Tosafot concur that according to the opinion of Abba Shaul there was a mitzva of netila for Israelites in their section of the Temple, entirely separate from the surrounding of the altar.

From all this, we see that our question of whether arava has an individual fulfillment or a fulfillment only regarding the altar is actually a disagreement among tanaim (Abba Shaul vs. Rabbanan), amoraim (Resh Lakish vs. R. Yochanan) and rishonim (Rambam and Ritva vs. Rashi and Tosafot).

Accordingly, we can now return to our point of departure and illuminate the distinction between lulav and arava outside the Temple. As we have seen, the essence of the fulfillment of arava is in the Temple, specifically at the altar, as per the simple meaning of the mishna that the main point of the mitzva of arava lies in the zekifa and the resulting fulfillment of the altar. Although it has been established for us that there is a netila aspect of arava as well, that can be seen as an expansion of the altar's function. In this, arava differs from lulav, for lulav even in the Temple was not a function of the altar (except according to R. Yochanan ben Beroka in Sukka 45a who held that they placed along the altar upright palm branches and not willows) but rather an obligation upon the individual which was fulfilled by the act of netila in the Temple. Despite the fact that even regarding lulav one must inquire whether the main fulfillment is that of the lulav itself or that of rejoicing in the Temple (cf the Rav's article on this issue which appeared in his book "Kovetz Chidushei Torah"), there still is much to differentiate it from arava. Even if simcha is the essence of the mitzvot of lulav, that simply means that there is a mitzva to be happy before God. However, the mitzva is a personal simcha incumbent on the individual, similar to the eating of ma'aser sheni and shalmei simcha, and is not a function of Temple ritual. This, though, is not the case with arava, which is not simply a function of the mitzva to rejoice in the Temple but rather is integrally a Temple-related mitzva (in the same way that the guarding of the temple gates is) and therefore is performed only by Kohanim.

Therefore, the difference between the two outside the Temple is, also, evident. Lulav, which is an obligation upon the individual, applies both in and out of the Temple, as the action of the individual can retain its significance outside the Temple. Thus, the biblical obligation of lulav applies outside the Temple. The biblical mitzva of arava, on the other hand, does not pertain outside the Temple, for there is no significance to arava without the altar. For this reason they differ on the rabbinic level as well. Lulav, which has significance outside the Temple, was enacted as a fully obligatory rabbinic mitzva. The significance of doing something "in memory of the Temple" lies in replicating outside the Temple exactly what had, in previous times, been performed inside it, and thus it applies all seven days, as it did in the Temple. Arava, however, which lacks all meaning outside the Temple, cannot be replicated, for without the altar, it bears no resemblance whatsoever to the original mitzva in the Temple. Because of this, it is simply a minhag which serves to remind us of the Temple, and is not a full fledged enactment "zecher lemikdash." For this purpose, one day suffices. This is the meaning of the gemara's statement that: "Lulav, which has a root in the Torah, is performed outside the Temple all seven days 'zecher lemikdash'. Arava, which has no root in the Torah, is not performed outside the Temple all seven days 'zecher lemikdash'." That is, as we have explained, the fact that lulav is biblically prescribed outside the Temple (for one day) shows that its practice has significance there, and thus can be rabbinically enacted for all seven.

Arava, however, which has no biblical precedent outside the Temple, and in fact lacks all significance there, cannot be rabbinically prescribed as a mitzva for seven days as in the Temple, but only as a mere allusion (which is accomplished with one day).

This explains the opinion of Rabbenu Tam that this minhag is of lesser status than others and is, in fact, no more than a mere shaking. That is, that arava outside the Temple, without an altar, can only be "tiltul be'alma", and therefore cannot be transformed into an act of mitzva. This is not, however, the case with other minhagim like the recitation of "half-Hallel" and second-day Yom Tov which bear significance as acts of mitzva resembling "whole Hallel" and one-day Yom Tov, and thus require a blessing.

It appears to me, that with this in mind one may attempt to explain an additional point which is unique to arava. We mentioned that Abba Shaul disagreed with the sages regarding the source of the mitzva of arava. According to Abba Shaul the mitzva of arava is derived from the verse which speaks about lulav, while the sages maintain that it is not explicit in the Scriptures, but is rather a "halacha leMoshe miSinai" alone. This has been stated by R' Nehunia of the Beit Churtan Valley, "[The law of] ten trees, arava and nissuch hamayim (the water libation on Sukkot) are halachot leMoshe miSinai." Although there are many halachot leMoshe miSinai, what distinguishes arava (and nissuch hamayim) is that the entire mitzva has no source other than halacha leMoshe miSinai, as opposed to other instances where the primary source is within the Torah, and the halacha merely provides supplementary details (as in the black color of tefillin, the five invalid shechitahs, and the like).

It seems that this is connected to our previous discussion: Only in the Temple can there be mitzvot which are completely halacha leMoshe miSinai! Two reasons for this can be offered:

a. The Temple is the earthly dwelling place of God, and therefore its procedures can be determined by means of an oral transmission from God to Moshe, as instructions pertaining to "His House". However, for other mitzvot which apply outside the Temple, and are directed to people at their home and work, His wisdom decreed that a Torah source is necessary, in order to establish the basic principle.

b. One can further suggest that in the Temple, arava and "nissuch hamayim" can be seen as components of the broader framework of Temple service in general and Sukkot ritual in particular, and as such they are in fact details of a framework which has its source in the Written Law.

However, it should be noted, there are limits to how far one can delve, and all this cannot but remain within the realm of speculation.

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