



5780 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Ha'Azinu / פרשת האזינו

Building the Sukkah and Zion

According to the testimony of a student of the Vilna Ga'on, there were several verses that he would repeat daily.¹ One of them was a verse from Tehillim: “[God’s] Sukkah was in [Yeru]Salem, and His dwelling place in Zion.”² While this verse beautifully describes that God dwells in Yerushalayim, what is this verse’s unique significance such that the Vilna Ga’on felt the need to repeat it so frequently?

The answer is that by paralleling the Sukkah with Zion, the Vilna Gaon felt that this verse contained one of the most central ideas for his generation’s unique task of furthering redemption. As is well known, the Vilna Gaon was a great lover of the Land of Israel and several of his students eventually emigrated to Yerushalayim and established the Ashkenazi community there. It is important to underscore that this community was not simply motivated by a love for the Land. Rather, based on his understanding of Kabbalah, the Vilna Gaon felt that his generation lived at a crucial juncture in the messianic process and actively moving to the Land and engaging in its material rebuilding was a key element in furthering redemption.³

Among a wide array of verses, rabbinic passages and kabbalistic hints, it seems that the Vilna Gaon highlighted the unique connection between Sukkah and rebuilding the Land of Israel. According to the book Kol HaTor, the Vilna Gaon taught the following as one of the foundational principles of redemption:⁴

One of the characteristics of Mashi’ach ben Yosef is success through action as the verse states regarding Yosef “everything that he would do, God would cause to be successful.” And the teaching of our master [the Vilna Gaon] is well known, that there are two mitzvot that a person enters with his entire body: Sukkah and the Land of Israel. And this is hinted to in the verse:

¹ Doresh LeTzion: Derashot Meyasdei Artzeinu HaKedosha, 217.

² Tehillim 76:3. Translation adapted from Chabad.org.

³ For a brief summary of some of the scholarship on this topic, see https://jewishaction.com/books/two_hundred_years_in_erezt_yisrael_the_semiinal_aliyah_of_the_talmidei_hagra/.

⁴ Kol HaTor, perek 1.



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“[God’s] Sukkah was in [Yeru]Salem, and His dwelling place in Zion.” And [the Vilna Gaon] added: the Sukkah must be actively built and this is similarly true regarding Zion...

The Vilna Gaon referenced the halakha that one must actively build the schach and not build walls under pre-existing schach. A similar activist attitude is necessary regarding Zion. We cannot passively sit and wait for redemption to come, but we must be actively engaged in the material and spiritual rebuilding of Zion. It is for this reason that the Vilna Gaon attributed so much significance to this verse in Tehillim.

This Sukkot, as we sit in our sukkah let us contemplate this lesson of the Vilna Gaon. Even as God determines our history, He expects us to act, be decisive and accelerate the movement towards Mashi’ach. This is true regarding our sukkah which we must actively build, and also true regarding Zion – the capital of our beloved Land.