

Sukkot: What if God Was One Of Us?

Rabbi Joshua Rabin, Astoria Center of Israel, Astoria, New York¹

Vayikra 23:40	
וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְּרִי עֵץ הָדָר כַּפֹּת תְּמָרִים וְעֵנָף עֵץ-עֲבֹת וְעַרְבֵי-נַחַל וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים:	On the first day, you shall take the product of <i>hadar</i> trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the ETERNAL your God seven days.

Mishneh Torah, Positive Mitzvot 169	
לִטֹּל לולָב, שְׁנֵאֵמַר: "וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן, פְּרִי עֵץ הָדָר כַּפֹּת תְּמָרִים" (ויקרא כג, מ).	To take the lulav [and the other three species on Sukkot], as [Leviticus 23:40] states: "And you shall take for yourselves on the first day, the fruit of a beautiful tree, a palm branch,...."

1. Immanence or Transcendence?

Midrash Vayikra Rabbah 30:9	
דָּבָר אַחֵר, פְּרִי עֵץ הָדָר, זֶה הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שֶׁתּוֹב בּוֹ (תהלים קד, א): הוּד וְהָדָר לְבָשֶׁת. כַּפֹּת תְּמָרִים, זֶה הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שֶׁתּוֹב בּוֹ (תהלים צב, יג): צִדִּיק כְּתִמָּר יִפְרֹחַ. וְעֵנָף עֵץ עֲבֹת, זֶה הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, דְּכָתִיב (זכריה א, ח): וְהוּא עֹמֵד בֵּין הַהֲדָסִים. וְעַרְבֵי נַחַל, זֶה הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, דְּכָתִיב בֵּיה (תהלים סח, ה): סֹלוּ לָרֶכֶב בְּעֲרֹבוֹת בֵּיה שְׁמוֹ.	Another matter [attributed to Rabbi Akiva ²]: "The fruit of a pleasant [<i>hadar</i>] tree" – this is the Holy One blessed be He, in whose regard it is written: "You are clothed in splendor and glory [<i>hadar</i>]" (Psalms 104:1). "Branches of date palms" – this is the Holy One blessed be He, in whose regard it is written: "The righteous blossoms like a date palm" (Psalms 92:13). "A bough of a leafy tree" – this is the Holy One blessed be He, as it is written: "He stands among the myrtle shrubs" (Zechariah 1:8). "Willows of [<i>ve'arve</i>] the brook" – this is the Holy One blessed be He, in whose regard it is written: "Praise Him who rides in the highest heavens [<i>baaravof</i>], whose name is the Lord" (Psalms 68:5).

Midrash Vayikra Rabbah 30:12	
דָּבָר אַחֵר, פְּרִי עֵץ הָדָר, אֵלּוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל, מֶה אֶתְרוֹג זֶה יֵשׁ בּוֹ טַעַם וְיֵשׁ בּוֹ רִיחַ, כֹּךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ בָּהֶם בְּנֵי אָדָם שְׂיֵשׁ בָּהֶם תּוֹרָה וְיֵשׁ בָּהֶם מַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים. כַּפֹּת תְּמָרִים, אֵלּוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל, מֶה הַתְּמָרָה הַזֹּאת יֵשׁ בּוֹ טַעַם וְאֵין בּוֹ רִיחַ, כֹּךְ הֵם יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ בָּהֶם שְׂיֵשׁ בָּהֶם תּוֹרָה וְאֵין בָּהֶם מַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים. וְעֵנָף עֵץ עֲבֹת, אֵלּוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל, מֶה הָדָס יֵשׁ בּוֹ רִיחַ	Another matter: "The fruit of a pleasant [<i>hadar</i>] tree" – this is Israel; just as the citron has taste and has fragrance, so Israel has people among them who have Torah and have good deeds. "Branches of date palms" – this is Israel; just as the date palm has taste but has no fragrance, so Israel has people among them who have Torah but do not have good deeds. "A bough of a leafy tree" – this is Israel; just as the myrtle has

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

² A parallel source in Pesikta D'Rav Kahana 27:9 attributes the same teaching to Rabbi Akiva.

<p>וְאִין בּוֹ טַעַם, כִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ בְּהֶם שְׂשִׁישׁ בְּהֶם מַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים וְאִין בְּהֶם תּוֹרָה. וְעֶרְבִי נָחַל, אֵלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, מֶה עֶרְבָה זֶה אִין בְּהֶם טַעַם וְאִין בְּהֶם רִיחַ, כִּי הֵם יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ בְּהֶם בְּנֵי אָדָם שְׂאִין בְּהֶם לֹא תּוֹרָה וְלֹא מַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים, וְיִמָּה הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עוֹשֶׂה לָהֶם, לֹאבֶדֶן אִי אֶפְשָׁר, אֲלֹא אֲמַר הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יִקְשְׁרוּ כָלֶם אֲגֻדָּה אַחַת וְהֵן מִכְפָּרִין אֵלֹהֵי עַל אֵלֹהֵי, וְאֵם עֲשִׂיתֶם כִּי אוֹתָהּ שְׁעָה אֲנִי מִתְעַלֶּה, הִדָּא הוּא דְכְתִיב (עמוס ט, ו): הַבּוֹנֶה בְּשָׁמַיִם מַעֲלוֹתָיו, וְאִמְתִּי הוּא מִתְעַלֶּה כְּשֶׁהֵן עֲשִׂיָּין אֲגֻדָּה אַחַת, שְׁנֶאֱמַר (עמוס ט, ו): וְאֲגֻדְתִּיו עַל אֶרֶץ יִסְדָּהּ, לְפִיכָהּ מִשָּׁה מְזַהֵר לְיִשְׂרָאֵל: וְלִקְהָתָם לָכֶם בְּיוֹם הָרָאשׁוֹן.</p>	<p>fragrance but has no taste, so Israel has people among them who have good deeds but do not have Torah. "Willows of the brook" – this is Israel; just as the willow has no taste and has no fragrance, so Israel has people among them who do not have Torah and do not have good deeds. What does the Holy One blessed be He do to them? To eradicate them is not possible. Rather, the Holy One blessed be He said: Let them all be bound together in a single bundle and they will atone for one another. If you do so, at that moment, I will be ascendant [<i>mitaleh</i>]. That is what is written: "Who built His upper chamber [<i>maalotav</i>] in the heavens" (Amos 9:6). When is He ascendant? When they are made into a single group, as it is stated: "And established His group upon earth" (Amos 9:6). Therefore, Moses exhorts Israel and says to them: "You shall take for you on the first day."</p>
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Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Heavenly Torah, ed. Gordon Tucker, 270

The transcendental school developed a theology that is boldly directed toward the heavenly world; the immanentist school arrived at a theology that is much more modest and conservative, content to understand the teachings of Torah as reflecting primarily humanity's destiny in this world. Each of these two views became the foundation and source of differing concepts and value systems—one in opposition to the other. Thus, two systems of thought were crystallized on the matter of reasons for the mitzvot... The immanentist view teaches that the reason for the mitzvot was to bestow merit upon Israel, or that the sole purpose of the mitzvot is to purify human beings. In contrast, the transcendental view maintains that the mitzvot were ordained to bring satisfaction to the Holy and Blessed One.

2. Mysterium Tremendum

Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 12-13

Faith unto Salvation, Trust, Love—all these are there [in sincerely felt religious experience]. But over and above these is an element which may also on occasion, quite apart from them, profoundly affect us and occupy the mind with a well-nigh bewildering strength... If we do so we shall find we are dealing with something for which there is only one appropriate expression, *mysterium tremendum*.

The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its 'profane,' non-religious mood of everyday experience... Conceptually, "mysterium" denotes merely that before which the eyes are held closed, that which is hidden and esoteric, that which is beyond conception or understanding, extraordinary and unfamiliar...

3. What If God Was One Of Us?

Joan Osborne, "One Of Us" (1995)

If God had a name, what would it be?
And would you call it to His face
If you were faced with Him in all His glory?
What would you ask if you had just one question?...

What if God was one of us
Just a slob like one of us
Just a stranger on the bus
Tryna make his way home
Just tryna make his way home
Like a holy rolling stone?
Back up to heaven all alone
Just tryna make his way home
Nobody callin' on the phone
'Cept for the Pope, maybe in Rome